


*Elsie  
Lindtner*

**KARIN MICHAELIS  
STANGELAND**



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ELSIE LINDTNER

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*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*  
**THE DANGEROUS AGE**  
*Letters and Fragments from  
a Woman's Diary*

# ELSIE LINDTNER

A Sequel to "The Dangerous Age"

BY  
KARIN MICHAËLIS  
STANGELAND

*AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION*

BY  
BEATRICE MARSHALL

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## PREFACE

**R**EADERS and admirers of "The Dangerous Age"—and their name is legion—will find themselves perfectly at home in the following story. To them, Elsie Lindtner's rambling aphorisms, her Bashkirtseffian revelations of soul, the remarkably frank letters which she delights to write to her friends, among whom she numbers her divorced husband; above all, her rather preposterous obsession with regard to the dangers of middle age, will be familiar as a twice-told tale.

Doubtless many will be charmed to meet Elsie Lindtner again, when she has passed through the dreaded furnace of her "forties," and is still keeping the spark of inextinguishable youthfulness alive within her, by gam-

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bling at Monte Carlo, travelling in Greece with Jeanne of the flaming hair, fencing in London, riding in New York, and finally finding happiness and salvation in the adoption of a small offscouring of the streets.

But for those who may have missed reading the little masterpiece of modern femininity which only a short time ago set a whole continent by the ears, some sort of key is, possibly, necessary to the enjoyment of "Elsie Lindtner."

In "The Dangerous Age" Elsie Lindtner writes an autobiographical letter to Joergen Malthe, the rising young architect, who has been her ardent admirer. She tells him now that her mother died when she was born, and her father was bankrupt, and lived disgraced in retirement, while she was left to the care of a servant girl.

From her she learnt that lack of money was the cause of their sordid life, and from that moment she worshipped money.

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"I sometimes buried a coin that had been given me," she writes, "as a dog buries a bone."

When she went to school little Elsbeth Bugge was soon informed that she was "the prettiest girl in the school"; that a pretty face was worth a fortune.

"From that moment I entered upon the accursed cult of my person which absorbed the rest of my childhood and all my first youth. . . . I avoided the sun lest I should get freckles; I collected rain water for washing; I slept with gloves, and though I adored sweets, I refrained from eating them on account of my teeth. I spent hours brushing my hair."

One day when she came home she found the only big mirror in the house had been transferred from her father's room and hung in her own.

"I made myself quite ill with excitement, and the maid had to put me to bed. But

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later on, when the house was quiet, I got up and lit my lamp. I spent hours gazing at myself in the glass. There I sat till the sun rose.”

Then follows an account of how this child, scarcely in her teens, positively set her cap at a rich, elderly widower, because he had a fine house.

“My brain reeled as I said to myself, ‘Some day I will live in that house as wife of the Chief Magistrate.’ ”

The precociousness of Marie Bashkirtseff who fell in love with a duke when she ought to have been playing with her dolls, pales into insignificance beside this confession.

Elsie left school and went back to Denmark engaged to Herr von Brincken, the Chief Magistrate, but he had heart disease and she did not marry him. Instead she married Richard Lindtner, a wealthy Dane, and made her home with him in the Old Market Place at Copenhagen, where for twenty-two

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years she was, to outward appearances, a happy and contented wife.

“I allowed my senses to be inflamed while my mind remained cold and my heart contracted with disgust. I consciously profaned the sacred words of love by applying them to a man whom I chose for his money. Meanwhile, I developed into the frivolous society woman everybody took me to be. Every woman wears the mask which best suits her purpose. My mask was my smile. . . .”

It is only in this book, the second instalment of Elsie Lindtner's fragmentary diary and correspondence, that she gives us a reason for leaving her husband after twenty-two years of married life, the wish that he should have children. In “The Dangerous Age” she hints at other and various reasons. To her friend and cousin, Lili Rothe, the perfect wife and mother of “lanky daughters,” who could love another man passionately without ceasing to love her husband, she writes, when

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announcing her divorce, "There is no special reason . . . none at least that is explicable to the world. As far as I know Richard has no entanglements, and I have no lover. There is no shadow of a scandal connected with our separation beyond that which must inevitably arise when two middle-aged partners throw down their cards in the middle of a rubber. . . . My real reason is so simple and clear that few will be content to accept it. . . . You know that Richard and I have got on as well as two people of opposite sex can do. There has never been an angry word between us. But one day the impulse—or whatever you like to call it—took possession of me that I must live alone—quite alone, and all to myself. Call it an absurd idea . . . call it hysteria—which, perhaps, it is—I must get right away from everybody and everything. Joergen Malthe has planned and built a little villa for me in the belief that it was for some one else. The house is on an island, the name

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of which I will keep to myself for the present.

In her self-communings, however, she never disguises the fact that escape from boredom was the main motive of her returning to the White Villa.

“Richard is still travelling, and entertains me scrupulously with accounts of the sights he sees and his lonely nights. . . . As in the past, he bores me with his interminable descriptions, and his whole middle-class outlook. . . .”

Richard’s neatness and tidy ways bored her; his correctness in the convenances; even his way of eating, and “to watch him eat was a daily torture.”

“Sundays were no better in the Old Market Place. There I had Richard from morning till night. To be bored alone is bad; to be bored in the society of one other person is much worse. To think that Richard never noticed it! His incessant talk reminded me

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of a mill-wheel, and I felt as though all the flour were blowing into my eyes."

In another place she says: "I am now sure that even if the difference in our own age did not exist, I could never marry Malthe. . . . I could do foolish, even mean things for the sake of the one man I loved with all my heart. . . . But set up a home with Joergen Malthe—never!"

The terrible part of home-life is that every piece of furniture in the house forms a link in the chain which binds two married people long after love has died out—if indeed it ever existed. Two human beings—who differ as much as two human beings always must do—are forced to adopt the same tastes, the same outlook. The home is built upon this incessant conflict.

"How often Richard and I gave way to each other with a consideration masking an annoyance that rankled more than a violent quarrel. . . . What a profound contempt I



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felt for his tastes and, without saying so, how he disapproved of mine. No, his home was not mine, although we lived in it like an ideal couple. My person for his money—that was the bargain crudely but truthfully expressed.”

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Even in her White Villa, on its island with a forest of her very own, Elsie Lindtner, to her intense disappointment, was bored. She lived there with two servants, Torp, the cook (a delightful figure), who believed in spooks, and whose teeth chattered when she told ghost stories; and Jeanne, the mysterious young housemaid with “amber eyes” and hair that glowed like red fungi against the snow, who wore silk stockings, and won Elsie’s heart by admiring and dressing Elsie’s own wonderful hair. Jeanne became the salient interest in Elsie’s hermit life on the island, and was promoted to the intimacy of companion and confidante. It was Jeanne who arranged the

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flowers artistically with her "long, pointed fingers," and picked up her skirts disdainfully when she passed the flirtatious gardener, to whose fascinations Torp, the cook, became a hapless prey. Torp "made herself thin in collecting fàt chickens for him," and he played cards with her in the basement kitchen.

Jeanne rowed hard in the little white boat across the lake to catch the last post with Elsie's fatal invitation to Malthe. "I will never part with Jeanne," Elsie said as she watched her. Then she wandered at random in the woods and fields, and scarcely seemed to feel the ground under her feet. The flowers smelt so sweet, and she was so deeply moved.

"How can I sleep? I feel I must stay awake until my letter is in his hands. . . . Now it is speeding to him through the quiet night. The letter yearns towards him as I do myself. . . . I am young again, yes, young, young! How blue the night is."

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But she could not, alas, young as she felt, get into the white embroidered muslin which used to become her so well, and Malthe's first glance told her all.

"He cast down his eyes so that he might not hurt me again." One reads of tears of blood. ". . . During the few hours he spent in my house I think we smiled 'smiles of blood.'"

Malthe left the White Villa the same night, and said at parting, "I feel like the worst of criminals."

After this shattering blow Elsie in her despair craved for even the boring society of the husband she had deserted. She was, to use her own expression, "greedy of Richard's caresses," and invited him, too, to visit her on her island. But Richard declined altogether. He had just become engaged to a girl, "a mere chit of nineteen."

"He has made a fool of me! I am done for. Nothing is left to me but to efface myself as soon as possible."

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Elsie Lindtner's method of effacing herself for the second time was to quit her desert island, and take a Cook's tour round the world with Jeanne.

Thus it happens that we renew acquaintance with her breaking the bank at Monte Carlo in the first pages of this book to which she has given her own name, though it might just as appropriately have been entitled "More Dangerous Age Reflections." For here, again, the "transition" is the absorbing topic of Elsie Lindtner's thoughts and correspondence; one might almost say it is "the bee in her bonnet." Even when she has emerged triumphantly, as she boasts afterwards, from its perils, and has found a new source of interest and happiness in the street arab whom she has adopted, she seems unable to keep the subject out of her conversation and letters. She goes so far as to warn strangers of the "stealthy footsteps of the approaching years," and disputes with her dear friend, the extraor-

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dinary widow, Magna Wellmann, which of them came through those years, "when we are all more or less mad," with the greatest *éclat*.

In "Elsie Lindtner" we miss the *mise en scène* of the White Villa on the island, with its forest and lake, for when Elsie re-visits it with Kelly, it hardly seems the same place, with no Torp and no gardener. . . . We miss, too, the first, fine, careless rapture of feminine revolt which characterises "The Dangerous Age," and the Jeanne of these pages is not so vivid as the Jeanne of the former book. In compensation we have more of Magna, and we have Lili Rothe's love-letters—which were addressed but never sent to the man she loved. Also, as in the previous volume, we have Elsie Lindtner's letters, with their strange, pathetic eloquence, marvellously revealing a woman's complicated soul. Their literary merit and their value as a picture of life cannot fail to impress all readers.

BEATRICE MARSHALL.



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ELSIE LINDTNER

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# *Elsie Lindtner*

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MONTE CARLO.

**D**EAR RICHARD,  
Thank you for the money, and forgive my audacious telegram. I am directing this letter to your office, as it has nothing to do with domestic affairs.

You really must help me. We, Jeanne and I, are stranded here like a pair of adventur-esses, and don't know what to do. I have wired to my lawyer, who has simply replied with an unconditional "No." The creature seems to think he has the right to manage my fortune as well as myself. Naturally, I find it far from pleasant to be obliged to apply to you, but you are the only person I can think of to whom I can turn without risking a refusal.

I have been gambling, winning and losing,

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finally losing. I am overdrawn, and the last draft which Riise had the grace to send me is gone.

Your money kept me going for two hours, but now that is gone, too. I have pawned the few valuables I possessed, but I am determined to win everything back. So please don't give me good advice; instead, go and talk to Riise. Explain to him that it is urgent, and I *must* have the money. I am quite indifferent as to what becomes of the capital. I don't mind paying dearly for this spree—or whatever you like to call it—and being poor afterwards in consequence. If the matter goes awry, you'll hear nothing more of Elsie Lindtner. I shall neither take poison nor shoot myself. There is a more comfortable way out of it. A Brazilian, whom I don't like, has lent me a big sum of money. If I borrow any more of him, it'll have to come to a bargain. Make Riise sell the stock, even at a heavy loss, I must have money.

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Meanwhile send me all you can spare at the moment by cheque. I hope you continue to be as happy as ever.

With many thanks in advance,

Yours,

ELSIE.

MONTE CARLO.

DEAR RICHARD,

A friend in need is a friend indeed. Accept my thanks for your prompt and ready help. All the same, I could not wait till it came, and borrowed again from the Brazilian. His obnoxious money has brought me luck. If it had been the other way about—well, never mind. It was a mad, desperate plunge on my part. Now that it is over I cannot understand how I could nerve myself for it. But I have won. The night before last I raked in two hundred and fifty thousand francs besides all that I had lost. After that I laid down to sleep. Your money has just arrived. I shall send it back at once with what you sent me before, and the amount I have wrung out of Riise. Jeanne has started packing.

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To-morrow we leave here. We are going for Jeanne's sake. She has taken my gambling too much to heart.

Now, if you possibly can, forget this little episode. I wasn't completely myself. It's all over, and too late to repent. We intend to spend the rest of the winter in Tangiers and Cairo, and probably in Helvan. Jeanne wants to go to India, and I have no objection so long as the journey is not too difficult. At all events, we shall spend a few weeks in Paris, just to fit ourselves out stylishly.

It is positively disgraceful of me that I have forgotten to congratulate you on the birth of your son and heir. How I should like to see your paternal countenance—you might send me a photograph of yourself with the Crown Prince, and now, farewell, till circumstances throw us together again.

ELSIE.

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How long can things go on like this? We wander hither and thither, and have no abiding place, as if we were fugitives condemned to be eternally on the move. And we feign enjoyment of this perpetual unsettlement. Jeanne has long ago seen through the pitiable farce, but she continues to play her part loyally out of gratitude for the small kindness I have shown her. We get on quite well together. Jeanne reads in my face when it is best to speak, and when to be silent.

She is happiest on shore with terra firma beneath her feet, while I like best the gliding days and nights on board ship; the sky above, the sea beneath me, my brain vacant, and all my senses lulled to sleep. It reminds me of the early days on my solitary island, when every trifling incident was an affair of huge importance. The flight of a seagull, the top of a mast above the horizon—a ship sailing by in the night. We spend the day on our deck chairs, half dozing over a book, or con-

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versing in a company voice; but at night we throw ulsters over our nightgowns and pace the deck, our natures expanding like flowers which only shed their perfume after dark.

I have become very fond of Jeanne. Her poor, withered heart, too early developed, too soon faded, awakes a certain gentle compassion within me. All my opinions are accepted by her eagerly as golden rules for the ordering of life. If only I could forget! existence might be bearable. But I cannot forget. The glance which showed me the corpse of his love follows me continually everywhere. The humiliation in that glance! I don't love him, and I don't hate him. I am getting too lukewarm to hate. But contempt rankles—Jeanne is careful to say nothing that can hurt me, and yet sometimes she hurts me by being too tactfully silent! I don't want to be pitied, so we while away hours over our toilette.

How long can it go on?

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ATHENS.

Here it is as nice as anywhere else. I struggle bravely to let myself be enchanted with Greece's past, but in reality I care as little about it as I care for the potshares on the Keramaikos.

We are attending Professor Dörpfeld's lectures on "The Acropolis," and I am more interested in the way the man says things than in concentrating my mind on what he says. He has made himself so thoroughly familiar with the plastic beauty of the world, that finally the invisible words that fall from his lips seem to have become plastic, too. I take no interest in why the pillars are thickest in the middle. It is the olive groves, and the lights and shadows flitting over Athens, that charm and engross me.

Jeanne takes it all in like a gaping-mouthed schoolgirl; she studies the history of art in the hotel. I have given her leave to go on an



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excavating expedition, but without me. I strongly object to riding through snow up to my waist, sleeping in tents on the bare ground, and living on mutton and canned goods. My laziness is growing.

### LUXOR.

I am uneasy about Jeanne. She is strung up to a state of enthusiasm which alienates me. Is it travelling that has developed her, or are her hitherto dormant abilities awakening? We are simply travelling to kill time, but she takes everything with the same tremendous seriousness as that day in Berlin when she first heard Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. She regards me as if it were long ago an accepted fact that we each exist for ourselves, alone in our separate worlds. She skips half the meals to roam about among the temples. To-night we sat on top of the great pylon and watched the sun go down. For me it was just like a beautiful decorative

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effect at the theatre. I couldn't help thinking of "Aïda." She wouldn't come in when I did, and when I suggested that the night air was chilly she answered quite snappishly, "I wish to see the moon illumine the classic sea." Of course, I left her alone, but I couldn't sleep, and at about midnight I heard her come back. My door was open, and I called her in. She sat down on the end of my bed and was crying. What can be the matter with her?

I am not going to torment her with questions. She shall be free to come and go as she chooses—so long as she spares me the pæans of an enthusiasm which I cannot share. It is all very well here but I prefer myself in the Paris boulevards, Unter den Linden, and Bond Street. I feel so poverty-stricken when I see others full of emotional *élan*.

Yes, that is it. That is why I am nervous about Jeanne's enthusiasm for art. She reminds me of old days when Malthe, in my

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yellow room looking over the market-place, told me of his travels, and I deluded myself into imagining I understood what he was talking about. . . .

And so this phase has come to an end, too! I had quite thought that Jeanne had sold herself to me for life. But it was not to be, after all. I might have prevented it. Perhaps she was waiting for a word from me. Still, it is best that we should part. Let her put her abilities to the test, by all means. She will soon have had enough of work, and I am in a position of being able to wait. Now I shall go to America, and if I find that bores me, too, God only knows if I shan't give in and accept the Brazilian. His method of courtship, at least, is as systematic as a persecution. And at bottom I am flattered, that still—*still*; but for how much longer? I am deemed desirable. I ask myself in moments of doubt whether I should be even that, without the aid of Poiret and Worth.

**D**EAR JEANNE,—Little travelling companion.

So our paths separate—temporarily, or for ever—neither of us can say which. But I feel that it is best to part, and I am not at all sad or hurt. Two years is a good long time for two people to have lived together, and we have both derived some profit from those years. For me the profit lies also in their coming to an end, for you that you have found life worth living. As I said before, I strongly advise you to go through the whole training, which will prove whether you have creative talent, or your art is merely suited to commercial purposes. I shouldn't be surprised, indeed, if you became a designer of buildings—architect is, I suppose, too ambitious a word to apply to a woman—and as Greek and Egyptian temples are likely to be

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your speciality, you are hardly destined to be popular.

Now we have discussed all the practical points. I think you know that I wish you absolutely to enjoy your time in Paris. Enjoy it to the full, but don't commit any irrevocable follies!

You will get these lines from London, where I am amusing myself by a short obesity cure. Imagine us fencing, like small children in black satin knickerbockers and white sweaters! Several ladies from Court take part in the "class." Afterwards we have a brisk but delightful hip-massage, and that alone makes it worth the trouble. Directly I am satisfied with the slimness of my exterior, I start for New York. You were never very happy over there, but for me that city has a peculiar fascination. I don't know myself what it consists in.

I beg you, from my heart, Jeanne, that you will always consider me as a friend to whom

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you can comfortably tell everything, and come to for sympathy and advice, whether in sorrow or happiness. You will, Jeanne, won't you? and don't neglect your appearance. Work may absorb you for a time, but that kind of thing is a transitory craze in a woman of your disposition. Your heritage is your appearance, remember.

Good-bye for the present, and "good luck," little travelling companion.

ELSIE LINDTNER.

**D**EAREST JEANNE,

Your last letter—to put it mildly—is very exaggerated. Frankly, it is positively hysterical. Why should you harp to me on your “guilt,” or your everlasting gratitude, on your privilege of making some sacrifice for me. I don’t understand a word of the whole rigmarole, not a single word. I don’t see the point of it in the least. Here I am perfectly content in my own solitary way, which is not a bit misanthropic, and my own desire is that you should feel content, too. Don’t you like Paris? You really needn’t be afraid to say so—or is it the work that you are sick of? If so, it is only what I have long expected.

According to my opinion, you belong to those human luxuries whose presence in the world are quite superfluous, but who have a

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certain genius through their mere existence alone of making life more tolerable for others. Your place is either this, or in the midst of a *grande passion* (heaven forbid) in which you would screw yourself into a bread pellet, to be held in some one else's mouth. I can see you like *The Princess on the Pea*, scorning everything, or I can see you on your knees scouring steps for the man you love.

But I should like to see the man you were able to love.

Perhaps you are in love? That idea has suddenly occurred to me, though it seems highly improbable. Now, however, that I have read through your last nonsensical letter again, I believe that I have really hit on the right solution.

You are in love, and out of feelings of mistaken gratitude, you do not like to tell me. Jeanne, Jeanne! Will you for my sake be an old maid? It is very sweet of you, but a little too much to expect. Besides, it is quite



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unnecessary. I am not going to lie, and pretend that it will not cost me something to give up my little fairy-tale princess with the beautiful hands. Not only my hair, but my shamefully overcultivated taste is missing you, with whom I was able to exchange ideas. An empty place on my balcony that will never be filled again till the aforesaid maiden sits in it with the sunlight shining on her and on the river, and on the town which is the town of all others.

But, Jeanne, our paths have diverged, and they can never again unite. You are not in the least fit to be in my company. You don't want me, but life, and joyousness. May you find it, no matter whether, like me, you sell yourself, and are shut up in a golden cage, whether you live your own fairy-tale, and realise the mirage of your dreams, or whether you develop into an artist. Only with me you would have no peace.

I noticed how you beat your wings when

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we were together, how you pined and tortured yourself to adopt the pose that pleased me. How for my sake you acted a part.

Instead of writing sheets, I send you these lines, and entreat you to answer by telegram so that you may tell me in the fewest possible words what has happened to you.

I am, God knows, so curious that I should like to send you a wire a yard long. But I must rule my spirit so as to take this modern city of New York.

Your

ELSIE.

**J**EANNE, JEANNE, JEANNE!

Only that! Thank God, only that. How infinitely comforting a telegram with its few concise words can be.

Don't let this matter worry you further. Of course, I'll take the child to my heart; or still better, I will adopt the child.

After all, it's much the same to me whether I have a camera, cacti, or a little child for a hobby. You needn't be afraid that I shall plant it in a flower-pot like a cutting, or pin it into my lace collection. It shall, I promise you, be properly cared for, not by me, but through me. I will engage the best nurse money can procure. If you like, too, I will sail with the nurse over the whole width of the Atlantic to receive the little eel in person. The more I think it over, the more excellent the plan seems to me. You will have no

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bother, will not be interrupted in your career, and I shall add to the long list of my crazes one more item. To prevent there being any sort of misunderstanding about it, I am perfectly confident that providing for the little legacy will be a source of new enjoyment to me.

I only make one condition, and that is, if the affair becomes too complete I may be allowed to put "our child" out to nurse.

It is to be hoped that the father has not won a fraction of your heart. I can well imagine that he is some young artist whom you have met at the class. He gazed at your hair till he was sick, which is not at all to be wondered at, and you forgot momentarily that you had long ago abjured all folly.

Write me more details as to whether you approve; when "it" is expected, and so on. I needn't advise you, of course, to leave Paris before the change in your exterior attracts

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notice. I am thinking a great deal of you,  
Jeanne, little Jeanne.

Your

ELSIE.

DEAR MAGNA WELLMANN,

And I am the woman who thought you had forgotten me, or that you still bore me a grudge for that letter which I wrote you four—no, it is already five—years ago.

Now I sit here and ponder whether the greatest transformation has been worked in you, or in me. You, at all events, are not the same, and I believe that I am not. But at our age, one is long past growing and developing.

You who of old were like a dry autumn leaf whirled before the wind, have proved yourself all at once to have a strength and courage which make me ashamed. Who has lulled your senses so to rest? The one “great” love? No, I will not ask questions, though a whole host of them pulsate within

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me. And you are not a bit afraid? You speak of it as if it were a mere frolic. You wonderful human creature, Magna. Other women suffer intolerably during the nine months of pregnancy, and grow irritable and ugly. But you are blooming as if it were the most perfectly natural condition to be in. What a contrast to your ordinary mood and your old escapades. You are not in the least afraid to bring a child into the world at your age; and in such circumstances every line of your letter breathes freshness and health, and there is no disguising it.

Do you know, your letter awoke in me the first longing for Denmark since I packed my boxes and went out into the wide world.

I have become an alien. Five years is not such a very long time, though long enough to render a person countryless. Richard in his pleasant way, keeps me *au courant* with what he calls the "main movements" of our circle, so I know that you have been banned and

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ostracised. I cannot say that I think it is altogether undeserved. You know that I insist on good form outwardly as well as inwardly, and, really, Magna, I cannot picture myself behaving as you have done, any more than I can picture myself going out in society in a nightdress with my hair hanging down in a pigtail. But, of course, it is your affair.

For the most part I take no interest in what goes on at home. It reminds me too much of looking at a drop of water through a microscope. If, by any chance, I come across a Danish newspaper, I read nothing but the obituaries, and even they do not rouse a shadow of emotion in my soul.

Yet there are fates which, out of curiosity or fellow-feeling, appeal to me. And yours is one of them. When Richard wrote, "Frau Wellmann's latest makes her 'impossible' in this part of the world," I could not help smiling. You made yourself impossible years ago. It is true, Professor Wellmann's name



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and social status have sheltered and held a restraining hand over you, that is to say, up till now.

But now it has come to an actual scandal. You parade your shame on the housetops of Copenhagen, instead of going away and hushing it up.

By the bye, how many small *affairs* were there not year after year *hushed up* in our set? The dear ladies even were not afraid to whisper about them to each other. And you, you even, delight in having a child of the peculiar kind that we call illegitimate. Magna, Magna! I am not going to suppose that behind it all is a spark of malicious joy in challenging the *crème de la crème*. That would be a poor joke. Neither can I believe that your motive has anything to do with *love* for the father of your illegitimate child.

You write so beautifully about the feeling that life is growing within you. In this re-

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spect, I am a stranger, and absolutely blind. I have never felt the smallest sensation of longing to feel that life is growing within me. Perhaps I am even incapable of understanding your expression. Yet it touches me.

You were entering on a period of severe trial for yourself and for the children, and the time of trial will not end with your confinement. There will most certainly have to be an explanation, and preferably an explanation that will bring as little injury as possible to the children. Have you thought of this? Don't put off the inevitable too long, or others may be before you. The children cannot—it would be terrible if they could—understand the whole, so the question is how to invent a fable which will best lull their reflection.

Many will judge you because you have done what is not customary and defied the usages of society; others will judge you out of envy, because they have not had the courage

## ELSIE LINDTNER

to do it themselves. Every one who has refrained through fear of disgrace and shame, will hurl a stone at you. Likewise the childless women. If I were still in the Old Market Place, I should flout you, too. Still, there are a whole lot of free-thinking human creatures who will judge you not on account of the child, but for the *children's* sake. You may shrug your shoulders at the others, but you can't get away from the shadow which you are casting on the children.

Well, now that I have discoursed to you in this extremely reasonable manner, I may with a clear conscience extend my hands across the ocean and say, "Good luck, Magna."

When the atmosphere becomes too hot to hold you, then take refuge with me. I live here, fourteen storeys high, on Riverside Drive. My name is on the door in characters as small as those on a postage stamp. It is the fashion here, and the letters are delivered to the porter. The house is mag-

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

nificantly arranged, and is as light as a studio. I steadily believe that I shall rest my bones in some peaceful burial ground here. And as it's the custom to adorn and paint the dead till they look twenty or thirty years younger than when they were alive, you will comprehend how that appeals to the vanity of one who has warded off the burden of age. I should just like to know how any woman devoid of vanity could exist in this city of light and sunshine. I belong to two or three clubs where ladies of seventy and eighty congregate, with porcelain complexions, powdered coiffures, and Gainsborough hats. Don't imagine for a moment that they are ludicrous. They possess a dignity and joy in existence which makes me think that they must pass their nights in a bath of youth.

There is a glamour of festivity hanging over this place. Not in the slums; but there of course, you needn't go. New York's poor

## ELSIE LINDTNER

have a totally different aspect and manner of behaviour from the poor of European cities, where they rub against travellers with their sores and crutches. In all these years I have only seen two human beings who didn't belong to Fifth Avenue. An Italian and his wife lay and sunned themselves on the curb and ate dirty vegetables out of a rusty tin. No one sent them off, but the whole traffic of the street gave them a wide berth, as if they had been a pair of plague-stricken patients.

I ride on horseback every day till I am dead tired, in a salmon-coloured habit and a slouch hat over my eyebrows. My master—a pitiful wreck of a once brilliant Scottish nobleman—at first objected to my riding *en cavalier*. But as I remained obstinate, he left me to my fate till one fine day he was seized with admiration for my mastery of the horse, and now we are good friends. We ride alternately in Central Park, which is indescribably lovely when all the beds are

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

aglow with rhododendrons in bloom, and in New Jersey, which is still unspoilt Nature. Sundays, as a rule, we form quite a cavalcade, and then we amuse ourselves like children. These people who are outwardly stiff and reserved, and inwardly do not overburden their souls with super-culture, have a wholly remarkable and infectious capacity for sucking honey out of the most trifling banalities of existence. We chat about the sun, moon and stars, about our horses, our ravenous appetites, and the recently discovered Rembrandt, and never about our neighbours. We never back-bite.

At the end of such a day, when I am resting after my bath, I seem to myself like a being with life all before me.

In truth, I have found congenial calm. I play bridge through the long winter mornings at the Astor Hotel Club, or go to lectures on psychology, followed by luxurious lunches during which Madame Homer and

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

Signor Caruso sing to us, not in the intervals, but while we eat!

The waiters go round pouring out coffee the whole time, while we sit in a rosy twilight. Every one pays every one else little choice and sincerely-meant compliments. Call it an empty life, if you like, and I won't deny that it is.

You ask what I have been doing since I took flight from my now desolate and dilapidated villa. If I only knew myself I would tell you. It all seems so long ago I travelled about with Jeanne, my young housemate and friend, and we really did nothing but kill time.

Rumours of my Monte Carlo period have no doubt penetrated to Denmark. I admit it was an ugly experience. Never in all my life had I imagined that I could become the prey of this passion, but I caught the fever so badly that I conducted myself as shamelessly as the most hardened professional gam-

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

blers. I certainly believe that during those days I was scarcely responsible. If the tide of fortune had not turned I should have gambled away every farthing I possess. But things went so well that I am living to-day on my winnings, without touching my dividends.

Jeanne is still in Paris, where she has been for the last two years. She intends to qualify for some industrial art, for she has an indisputable and highly original talent. Lately I have had a very significant letter from her, but I may not divulge its contents. If things turn out, as at present seems likely, my life may undergo a complete re-arrangement.

I must tell you about my latest craze. I have had quite a dozen little crazes in this one year alone. It is a splendid distraction. Well, my latest is collecting dwarf cacti and Japanese dwarf trees, which you hardly ever see in Denmark. They are only a few inches high, and incredibly old. You buy them in fat boxes, miniature imitations of Japanese



## ELSIE LINDTNER

gardens with rivers, bridges, and porcelain cupolas and tea-houses. They are entrancing. Fortunately, a gardener tends them; otherwise they would die of neglect. The care of plants is no more in my line than the care of children, or any other live things. If I had the gift I should have a choice little aquarium with goldfishes and electric light and illuminations.

Imagine Richard a paterfamilias and domestic tyrant! Yes, indeed, Magna, everything is changed.

Now, I really have told you all about myself. I don't believe there is a single craving of my soul that I have not disclosed to you. It's not my fault that the result of these disclosures appears so miserably poor. How old is Jarl now? Sixteen or more? It is a good thing that Agnete is soon to be married. Write again soon, Magna. I promise to answer.

ELSIE LINDTNER.

DEAR JEANNE,

It may be the consequence of your condition, but really, I am getting quite concerned about your letters. I thought everything was settled for good when I promised to relieve you of responsibility by taking the child. And now you begin posing new riddles.

What secret is it that you cannot betray? Why do you talk about hiding yourself in the remotest desert? From whom should you hide? For what reason? Why do you speak of desecration, and say you wish you could die before the child is born? You hate to do it a wrong? What wrong?

Is this man married? If so, his wife needn't know that you are going to give birth to a child. You don't want to marry him; or do you?

## ELSIE LINDTNER

If I may advise you, Jeanne, I should suggest your leaving the future to take care of itself, till you are established in peace and quietness in some pretty neighbourhood. What do you say to Provence? At the moment you are nothing but a bundle of nerves, and I have half a mind to come across and do what I can to help you. But I am too lazy. To do anything to help people when it involves trouble, is not my *métier*; for you, even, I cannot take trouble, though I love you.

But if there is anything on your mind, please let me know what it is, for, as I said before, I am unable to make sense out of the nonsense you have written. Write as often and at as great length as you like, and the day will come, I hope, when I shall at last grasp your meaning. Is it a human being that is lacking, one with whom you can really talk? I am experiencing every day a crowd of little stupid things, that keep me going in a most agreeable fashion. But I am chiefly taken up

*ELSIE LINDTNER*

with cherishing and cultivating my own precious appearance. Altogether, I was much more alive when we two sat together in our White Villa on the island, and saw the leaves falling from the trees.

Your

ELSIE.

\* \* \*

Jeanne . . . Malthe . . . Jeanne . . . Malthe.  
Jeanne and he . . . he and Jeanne. . . .

I must try to understand it. Those two . . .

And, it was the child of these two, their child, I wanted to adopt . . .

\* \* \*

Two days have passed, but I am no nearer understanding. I go round and round in an empty circle, and say to myself, "Jeanne and Malthe—Malthe and Jeanne." And I expect to be overcome by a heart-rending agony.

## ELSIE LINDTNER

But so far as I can judge, neither my heart nor my mind are affected. My nerves, too, are perfectly composed. I am, in fact, only petrified with astonishment.

\* \* \*

Why don't I suffer? What has become of the love I once felt. Where is it?—or—I understand those two so exactly. It's myself that I don't understand. I can give them my blessing with the easiest and most serene conscience in the world. I can even rejoice that these two, just these two, have found each other so futile; then am I so inexplicably, egregiously futile?

\* \* \*

I have begun to take delight in travelling by the Subway. People there don't pose. They are in too great a hurry to put on masks. Extraordinary how impressive breeding is when it is united with good clothes. The

## ELSIE LINDTNER

train can be so full that there is often a double row extending from one end of the car to the other, hanging on to the round leather rings with coarse, toil-worn, or delicate kid-gloved hands. Some one always makes room for me, but I also take my time to form the desired expression on my face. To-day a poor woman sat next to me with two or three little wreaths on her lap. She wore a dusty mourning veil thrown over her hair.

She cried the whole way; the veil was so shabby that I calculated the child must have died a long time ago. Her grief was still fresh. Mine has never existed. I had thought my life at least contained what is called a great sorrow. But I have only draped an empty space with the trappings of sorrow . . .

I must write to Jeanne.

\*

\* \*

**D**EAR LITTLE TRAVELLING COMPANION,  
This letter might be written in twenty different ways, but only one is the right way, and now I begin writing to you in the same style as I write in my own poor, dull diary. You know it is only lazy people who can bear to record the barrenness of their daily life in a diary.

Accept my warmest and most sincere congratulations, dear Jeanne, and don't shed any more tears on my account. You have not transgressed anything, you dear child, with your refined humanity. Neither has he. Yet you fancy that your letters—your "confession," has caused me pain. Oh, no! Alas! it has done nothing of the kind. I say, alas! because I should so like to believe myself, that I had once in my life loved with my whole heart. Now I see it must have been

## ELSIE LINDTNER

all imagination. It can't be explained otherwise—a delusion, a myth—anything you like. Perhaps a charming dream.

Well, the dream is over; that is the only thing I am certain about. All that remains of it is the memory of a good friend who, by a truly magical freak of fate, has found the one woman, in my opinion, suited to him.

Jeanne, I am not disguising the facts. This is the first and the last time, too, for that matter—that the subject of Malthe and myself is mentioned between us.

The whole time you and I were knocking about the world like homeless vagrants, you never referred to it, or let drop a hint, that you knew the whole humiliating connection. Though *I knew that you knew*, and that raised you in my esteem as a human creature to an extraordinary degree. I think so highly of Malthe that you alone seem to me good enough for him. So you see what you write



## ELSIE LINDTNER

about committing a "robbery" has no point. And more than that, I can tell you I am one of those women ill adapted to *live with*, much less *to love*, another human being. I am quite clear now about this. You, on the contrary, in compensation for your joyless youth, are endowed with the capacity for self-sacrifice and yielding. For you it will be a positive delight to abandon your *ego*, and let it be absorbed by his. For me such a thing is inconceivable.

There is no necessity to recur any more to the past—at least as far as I am concerned. On your behalf we unfortunately have to do it. Much more than the news itself, does your question, shall you speak or be silent, perplex my brain and excite my emotions.

If my position was now what it once was, and my views of life what they once were, I should answer decidedly: Keep your lips closed, and the secret that concerns only you, locked in your heart! But now there are

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

other factors to consider. I am changed. Time and life—I scarcely know what—have changed me—and you are not like the majority of women, and Malthe is not a man like other men.

You may perhaps cause him a never-ending torment by speaking. Be clear on this, or you may cause yourself no less pain by keeping silent, and letting what is past and over for ever be forgotten. I know you, Jeanne; every day and every hour you will despise yourself more and more because his belief in you is so boundless.

You can't be silent. You will be compelled to lie. What to ninety-nine people out of a hundred would be simple and natural enough will undermine not only your self-respect, but your joy in life. On the other hand, you have never loved. The thing you call your past, has really had no significance for you. Why should it be unearthed now, and dragged into the glare of day? Why

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

should something that meant nothing but words to you, be made crucial? Are you two, you and he, to spend the most beautiful years of your love in exhuming corpses and taking them about with you wherever you go?

Joergen Malthe is not as other men are. He will never reproach you, but he will grieve, and you will grieve with him.

You see, I am unable to advise you. Perhaps I have no right to take the responsibility upon me. I have often talked by the hour to your future husband. But as far as I can remember, we never touched on the topic of woman in the abstract. Thus it comes about that I am ignorant of what Malthe's views are.

And yet—Malthe is the father of your child. The father of your unborn child.

Speak, Jeanne, speak openly and without fear. It will be setting up no defence for having yielded to his inclinations, but he will find

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

in it a means of explaining and defending what happened before his time; for Joergen Malthe is not like other men.

If he has thought it right and natural that the woman he loves should become his in the way you have become his, he will think it right and natural that you should have exercised the sovereignty over your person before you knew him. All you have got to tell him afterwards is that you love him and that you have never loved any one but him.

I seem to myself at this moment so very ancient. Such an eternity lies between then and now, but that is as it should be.

Little travelling companion with the red hair, let me see you helping him now in the prime of his manhood to build up his reputation, so that his name will become immortal. You understand how to see—how to enjoy. Pack your infant when it is born in a little trunk with perforated lid, and take it about with you, or leave it behind. Don't let it be

*ELSIE LINDTNER*

a hindrance or a barrier between you two in your joint lives.

There is a great deal more that I should like to write, but now I must go and dress. You know "Tristan and Isolde" always was my favourite opera.

I was going to urge you not to show this letter to Malthe, but, after all, I leave you a free hand in the matter.

For many reasons I believe that if he saw it the consequences would not be disastrous.

With many embraces. I wish you a happiness that will last through life.

Your

ELSIE LINDTNER.

You need not trouble to find me more lace patterns. I have presented my whole collection to the Metropolitan Museum. My new craze, dwarf cacti, amuses me far more—they can't be enclosed in letters and newspapers unfortunately.

## ELSIE LINDTNER

When did they first meet? It is no concern of mine, but I can't help thinking much about it. Did they know each other before? Yes, of course. He looked after her when she passed through the room. From me he looked across at her—and compared. And after—yes, what after? Did he think continually of Jeanne as before he thought of me? Or is it merely because chance has thrown them together in Paris? Or is it possible that they did not recognise each other at first, and only discovered later where they had met for the first time? Have I played any part in their conversation? Have they clasped hands over my memory, as over a grave?

\* \* \*

I don't grudge them their happiness. Jeanne is the right woman for him, and only a Joergen Malthe could satisfy and supplement Jeanne's whole nature.

## ELSIE LINDTNER

How has it come about that everything in me has gone to rest? I feel like a heap of faded leaves lying down somewhere in a deep hollow, where not a breath of wind reaches it, and it lulls itself to sleep.

I don't live now as I used to live, and I have no goal to strive for; but I have no cares, much less do I feel in despair about anything. Truly, I am very comfortable in mind and body. I should not mind living for ever this sort of life. Yet at the same time I should feel no alarm if some one came and said, "You must die to-night."

\* \* \*

When I consider it in broad daylight, I have a heap of enjoyments, small and insignificant, but perfectly unclouded enjoyments.

\* \* \*

Yes, here I am laid up with measles—at

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

my age—a fiery rash, and everything else. Perhaps I shall get whooping-cough next? It would be much the best plan if one could have every childish complaint at once and have done with it. It is boring in this magnificent carbolic-scented clinic; but the nursing is good, and it is said to be healthy to be bored. I always fancied the much spoken about self-sacrifice nurses to be an old wives' tale.

In the room next mine, there is the most passionate little monster of a boy nine months old, and no one would believe it, but all the nurses are willing to give up their sorely needed night's rest for his sake. I, for my part, wish he was in a hot place.

And then they actually ask me if I wouldn't like to have him "in my bed for a little." Heaven protect me and my well-conditioned intellect! Oh! I pity the poor women who have several little children at the same time! I'd like to know how many mothers really



## ELSIE LINDTNER

feel for their children—*because* it is their children.

Richard will get it with that wonder of a child. He boasts about his teeth, but he says nothing about the pain getting those teeth has cost him.

\* \* \*

Yesterday I had a visit from a convalescent, who went round paying visits to the patients who were still lying in bed. I shall make friends with her. She amuses me. How well I understood that there can be a certain charm in studying bacteria and bacilli—small causes, huge results.

Frankly, I thought at first that she had been in a reformatory. There was something about her that gave the impression that she must have been under restraint. I was quite prepared that she would confess to having committed some crime. But no, that wasn't it.

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

She had only been in all innocence a nun for twenty-two years. Twenty-two years a nun! Think of it! There were the years, too, that she was pupil and novice, making altogether twenty-six years behind the walls of a convent, subjected to the convent discipline and the weary convent habit. And now she has broken loose, like a prisoner who makes a rope of his bedclothes to escape over walls to freedom.

She had compelled—how, she did not disclose—the Church to set her at liberty, and now was beginning to live her own life for the first time. The life which she left at sixteen she has now taken up again at the age of forty-two. She looks like a person of sixty.

I could not forbear putting the indiscreet question, why she had broken away? And she replied, what was evidently the truth, that when she noticed she was beginning to grow old, a doubt arose within her as to whether the life in the world outside was not richer

## ELSIE LINDTNER

than the life behind the convent walls. She has given all her large fortune to the Church, and now lives on a scanty allowance grudgingly doled out to her by one of the sisters.

But she is happy as a queen in two little rooms, where she is her own mistress, able to eat and drink when she wants to, and as much as she likes. And she can serve her God unbidden by the ding-dong of the chapel bell—for she has not abjured her faith.

The one desire of her heart now is to find a man who'll marry her. Her modesty is certainly touching. She doesn't mind who he is, or what he looks like, if only she may be granted the wonderful happiness of having a husband. I lied my utmost to comfort her.

And if she can't get a husband, she intends to adopt a child.

A really sick, starving, miserable child. I said tamely, that if I cherished—as God forbid that I should—such a fad, I would, at all events, seek out a healthy, pretty, and well-

## ELSIE LINDTNER

nourished infant. Whereupon she answered, "I don't want a child to live for my sake; I want to live for the sake of a child." She is a fine, but rather queer creature. And she has promised to come and see me every day.

\* \* \*

Sister Ethel has bet me a palm—she has obviously an empty tub in her room—that if once I had the little boy next door with me for an hour, I should take him to my heart.

I would rather give her the palm straight off, and have nothing to do with the little boy; but still, if it gives her any pleasure, well, I'll have him this afternoon, but directly the hour is over, clean sheets.

\* \* \*

To my eternal shame I am bound to confess that I have lost the palm. It may be that all the nun's sentimental gabble has affected my

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

brain! I, who abhor the scent of little children, and shudder to touch them.

He lay perfectly still and squinted up at me, sucking a finger. It was the little finger. I really shouldn't mind losing another palm, but my pride, God be praised, prevents my giving expression to the wish.

\* \* \*

He doesn't cry when he is with me. Nobody can understand it. In the night when he was crying, I, foolish old person, rose from my bed of measles, and went to look in on him. I thought the nurse had gone away. It was rather a painful situation.

DEAR PROFESSOR ROTHE,<sup>1</sup>

Your letter was such a shock to me that I could not answer it at once. . . . That is why I sent you the brief telegram in reply, the words of which I am sorry I must repeat, "I know nothing about the matter." Lili has never spoken of it to me, or made the least allusion which could cause me to suspect such a thing. I may truthfully say that I never heard her mention the name of Director Schlegel. My first idea was that Lili had gone out of her mind, and I was surprised that you, a medical man, should not have come to the same conclusion.

But, after thinking it over for the last two days, I have changed my opinion. I think I am beginning to understand what has hap-

<sup>1</sup> Extracts from an earlier letter of Elsie Lindtner's to Professor Rothe, in "The Dangerous Age," are given here again, as they throw light on the episode which follows.

## ELSIE LINDTNER

pened, and I beg you to hold me alone responsible for what I am going to say. . . . I am only making suppositions. Lili has not broken her marriage vows. Any suspicion of such a thing is out of the question, her nature was too upright, too loyal. . . . If she appeared to you and the world happy in her married life, it was because she really was so. I entreat you to believe this.

Lili, who never told even a conventional lie, who watched over her children like an old-fashioned mother, careful of what they read and what plays they saw—how could she carry on an intrigue unknown to you and them? Perfectly impossible, my dear Professor. I don't say that she didn't speak the words you heard, but that you must have put a wrong interpretation on them.

Not once, but thousands of times, Lili has talked about you to me. She loved and

## ELSIE LINDTNER

honoured you. You were her ideal man, husband, and father.

She used literally to become eloquent on the subject of your operations. . . . She studied Latin in order that she might understand your scientific books, while, in spite of her natural repulsion from the sight of such things, she attended your anatomy classes and demonstrations.

When Lili said, "I love Schlegel and have loved him for years," her words did not mean, "And all that time my love for you was extinct."

No, Lili cared for Schlegel, and for you, too. . . . Probably you are saying to yourself, "A woman must love one man or the other."

With some show of reason you will argue, "In leaving my house, at any rate, she proved that Schlegel alone claimed her affection."

Nevertheless I maintain that you are wrong.



## ELSIE LINDTNER

Lili showed every sign of a sane, well-balanced nature. Well, her famous serenity and calmness deceived us all. Behind this serene exterior was the most feminine of all feminine qualities—the fanciful imagination of the visionary. Do you or I know anything about her first girlish dreams? Have you, in spite of your happy life together, ever really understood her innermost soul? Forgive me, but I do not think you have.

When a man possesses a woman as completely as you possessed Lili, he thinks himself quite safe. You never doubted for a moment that, having you, she could wish for anything else.

You are not only a clever and capable man, you are kind, and an entertaining companion; in short, you have many excellent qualities which Lili exalted to the skies. But your nature is not very poetical; you are, in fact, rather prosaic, and only believe what you see.

Contrast this with Lili's immense forbear-

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

ance. You remember how we used to laugh when she defended some criminal who was beyond all defence or apology. Something intense and far-seeing came into her expression, and her heart, prompted such a line of argument which reason could not support. She stood all alone in her sympathy, facing cold and incredulous people.

Then recollect the pleasure it gave her to discuss religious and philosophical questions.

She was not "religious" in the common acceptation of the word. But she liked to get at the bottom of things, and to use her imagination. We others were indifferent or frankly bored.

And Lili was so gentle she gave way to us.

Recall, too, her passion for flowers. She felt a physical pang to see cut flowers with their stalks out of water. Once I saw her buy up a flower girl's whole stock, because the poor things wanted water. You and your

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

children have no love of flowers. As a doctor, you are inclined to think it unhealthy to have plants in your rooms; consequently there were none and Lili never grumbled.

Lili did not care for modern music. César Franck wearied her, and Wagner gave her a headache. An old-fashioned harpsichord would be her favourite instrument, whereas at home her daughters thundered out Rubinstein and Wagner upon a concert grand, and you, dear Professor, when in a good humour, strode about the house whistling horribly out of tune.

Finally, Lili liked quiet, musical speech, and she was surrounded by people who talked at the top of their voices.

. . . She was happy because she willed to be happy. She had made up her mind that she was the luckiest woman in existence . . . happy in everything, and she was deeply grateful to you. But in the depths of her heart—so deep down that it never rose

## ELSIE LINDTNER

to the surface even as a dream—lay that secret trouble which has caused the present mischief.

I know nothing of her relations to Schlegel, but I think I may venture to say that they were chiefly limited to intercourse of the soul; . . . and so were fatal. Have you ever noticed the *timbre* of Schlegel's voice? He spoke slowly and so softly; I can quite believe it attracted your wife in the beginning; and that afterwards gradually, and almost imperceptibly, she gravitated towards him.

The man is now at death's door, and can never explain what passed between them—even admitting that there was anything wrong. As far as I know, Schlegel was infatuated with a totally different woman. Had he been really in love with Lili, would he have been content with a few words and an occasional pressure of her hand?

Why, then, has Lili left you, and why does she refuse to give you an explanation? Why

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

does she allow you to draw the worst conclusions?

I will tell you. Lili is in love with two men at the same time. Their different personalities and natures satisfy both sides of her character. If Schlegel had not fallen from his horse and broken his back, thereby losing all his faculties, Lili would have remained with you and continued to be a model wife and mother.

In the same way, had you been the victim of the accident, she would have forgotten all about Schlegel, and would have lived for you alone.

. . . Lili had not the strength to fight the first sharp anguish. The shock bewildered her, and the love of her imagination seemed to her at the moment the true one. She felt she was betraying you, Schlegel, and herself; and since self-sacrifice had become the law of her life, she was prepared to renounce everything as a proof of her love.

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

You, Professor Rothe, have acted very foolishly. You have done just what any average conventional man would have done. Your hurt vanity silenced the voice of your heart.

You had the choice of thinking two things: either Lili was mad, or she was responsible for her actions. You were convinced that she was sane, and playing you false in cold blood. . . .

You write that you have only taken your two elder daughters into your confidence. How could you have found it in your heart to do this . . . ?

Lili knew you better than I supposed. She knew that behind your apparent kindness there lurked a cold, self-satisfied nature. She understood that she would be accounted a stranger and a sinner in your house the moment you discovered in her a thought or sentiment that was not subordinate to your will.

## ELSIE LINDTNER

You have let her go, believing that she had been playing a pretty part behind your back, and that I was her confidante, and perhaps also the instigator of her wicked deeds.

Lili has taken refuge with her children's old nurse.

How significant! Lili, who had so many friends, knows by a subtler instinct that none of them would befriend her in her misfortune. If you, Professor Rothe, were a generous-hearted man, you would explain to the chief doctor at the Infirmary Lili's great desire to stay near Schlegel until the end comes.

She loves you, and it would fill her with grateful joy. . . . If Lili had your consent to be near Schlegel she would certainly not refuse to come back to her wifely duties as soon as he was dead. At first she might not be able to conceal her grief, and then it would be your task to help her to regain her peace of mind. . . . Schlegel was a man, but had he been a portrait or a character in a novel,

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

Lili would have fallen in love with him just the same, because her love was purely of the imagination.

You must do what you please. But one thing I wish you to understand. . . . If you are not going to act in the matter I shall act. I confess openly that I am a selfish woman, but I am very fond of Lili, and if you abandon her in this cruel and senseless way I shall have her to live with me here, and shall do my best to console her for the loss of an ungrateful husband, and a pack of stupid, undemonstrative children.

One of Lili's tears is worth more than all your masculine ebullitions of wrath.

One word more before I finish. Lili, so far as I can remember, is a year older than I am. Could you not, woman's specialist as you are, have found some excuse for her in this fact? Had Lili been fifty-eight or thirty-five, all this would never have happened. I do not care for strangers to look into my per-



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sonal affairs, and although you are my cousin's husband, you are practically a stranger to me. Nevertheless, I may remind you that women at our time of life pass through critical moments, as I know by daily experiences. A week or two ago it might have been impossible to write a letter such as this. I should probably have reeled off pages of incoherent abuse.

Show Lili that your love was not selfishness pure and simple.

With kind regards.

Sincerely yours,

ELSIE LINDTNER.

DEAR PROFESSOR ROTHE,

Lili has closed her eyes never to open them again. It will scarcely be a great blow to you and yours after what has passed; much more will it be a relief. For her, indeed, it was so.

I feel it my duty to Lili, not to you, to write this letter. You may make what use you please of it. It was I who procured Lili the sleeping draught, for which she had such a burning desire. With my hand in hers I sat beside her till she was cold, and I do not repent that I had the courage to commit what you, as a physician, will call a crime.

A few days before she fell asleep Lili entrusted a packet of letters to my care. I read them in the night, and now lay them in the coffin under her head. These letters were not to be read by the unauthorised, and you

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have become in relation to Lili one of the unauthorised.

You have called her's a harlot-nature—not in a moment of excitement, but because, after weighty consideration, you arrived at a conclusion to which the word was appropriate. It is not in my power to give you the satisfaction which you deserve, but I wish that the hour may come in which you will see what a desperate wrong you and your abominable children have done Lili.

Harlot-nature, indeed! You can say that of Lili to whom you were married for twenty years—Lili, the purest of beings!

You say, "She married me, she bore me children, she professed to love me, and all the time she had a lover behind my back. So she was of a harlot-nature!"

Professor Rothe, permit me to accompany you into your most private consulting room, the room in which you examine the most modest of your lady patients. Let me have

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it out with you, and inquire into your secret motives. It is possible that your modesty will be shocked, but you shall hear what I have to say on Lili's behalf, and on those words, "Judge not that ye be not judged."

When you married her your choice was made according to the dictates of your heart, and fell on a very young girl who lived on the blue heights of idealism. She was your wife, your friend, the mother of your children, the good angel of your home. And would you dare add that she was your love also? Yes. You think that because she loved you, and you loved her, and because you took her in your arms as your wife, that she was, of course your love. . . .

But I tell you Lili was never your love, and that she never had a lover. And the whole time you have known it perfectly well. Answer me, if you like, "There are thousands and thousands of women who, like Lili, are

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without feeling in this respect . . . still she loved another, and so deceived me.”

Is a rose less red and fragrant, because there are thousands of other red sweet-smelling roses?

But Lili's nature was so pure, so refined, that this deficiency as you would call it, did not exist for her. She knew what it meant, for she was not ignorant. She understood in others what she did not recognise in herself. She lived for you, her children, and her household, her own beautiful world, so essential was it for her to shed light and spread joy around her.

From this arose that wonderful harmony of her being, making of the non-waking of what was dormant within her, neither a trial nor a renunciation. If Lili had been blind she would have had the same happy nature, and would have learned the beauty of joyousness through the eyes of every seeing soul.

There never arose within her, as in the case

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of so many poor women, a conscious renunciation of the fire of the senses.

How infinitely she must have loved and revered you, to have been able to tolerate without complaint, without abhorrence and a sense of renunciation, the position of being your wife for so many years.

Schlegel was not her lover, though she loved him, and she was more intimate with him than I thought at first . . . and, listen, she loved him with unlimited abandon, because he did not possess a husband's rights to lord it over her, and did not assume them. This *she* was unconscious of. But there existed a . . . a difference between her feelings for you and for him. He personified all that she had dreamed in her childish years of "Love," and continued to personify it till her last hour.

Once she loved you thus, too, and would have gone on loving you in the same way if

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you had not desecrated her without awakening the woman within her.

Lili was the Sleeping Beauty who slumbered eternally. No knight ever roused her from her sleep. But you, the man to whom she presented her life's happiness, called her harlot-natured!

Her last days were given up to a despairing desire for death and pardon for the sin which she had never committed.

The Lili who came over here was so changed that I hardly knew her. My first thought as she touched me and uttered my name was, "Who is to blame for this?" It was not only a broken-hearted woman, but a detested and ill-treated human creature who flew from the pursuit of her persecutors to die, deserted, in a foreign land.

The Lili I once knew used to come into a room as the sunshine penetrates a wood, like joy itself. Every one could see through her

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radiant exterior right into the floor of her pure, white soul.

But the Lili who came over here trembled in every limb and dared not meet the eyes of anybody. Schlegel lies in his grave. When he lived I regarded him as indifferently as I should any stranger. Now my thoughts go out to him full of thankfulness.

And Lili came home to you and ate the bread of humiliation for four long years in your house, while people admired you because you had pardoned her so magnanimously. Your abominable children looked down on their mother and behaved to her as to one not responsible for her actions. Dancing went on in your house, Professor Rothe, and Lili sat upstairs alone in her room. Betrothal festivities were celebrated by your family, while the mistress of the house was said to be ill, so that her pale, grief-stricken face should not cast a shadow on the festive scene.



## ELSIE LINDTNER

I did the little I could, all that was in my power to win back the old, dear Lili, but it was too late. One cannot say that her mind was under a cloud, but she brooded day and night over a problem which she could not solve. Mostly she sat looking down on her hands, which were never still. Sometimes she talked of the children. She had once overheard Edmée say to one of the maids, it would be much better if mother were sent to an institution. Those words she could never forget.

Professor Rothe! Time after time unhappy women have come to you to be consoled, and helped by your explaining to them that the dangerous years of transition may affect the brain of even the steadiest and most normal of women.

You could treat others with consideration and give them shrewd and kind advice. But for Lili's dangerous period you did not concern yourself. You allowed fate to shatter

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her beautiful existence. You never stretched out a hand to protect her. For Lili's sake I cannot help hoping that there is a resurrection after death, a place "where nothing is dishonoured, where all is love." To such a place Lili belongs. I have chosen a grave for her, looking south, where flowers will flourish, and have done it in my name.

To-morrow, I shall send you the necessary business details—a death certificate referring to heart disease—even if I have to write it myself.

I have opened the window. The river is as blue as it used to be at home in light nights. Here it is the moon that makes it blue. If only I had the power I would lay Lili in a boat and let her drift out to sea.

*ELSIE LINDTNER.*

## LETTERS FROM LILI ROTHE TO THE MAN SHE LOVED

**I** HAVE accumulated so many letters from you. To-day another has come—a letter from you to me!

Thus I know that you still think of me. And it does me good to know it. I go about thinking of you always and always, and it makes me happy. I want nothing different and nothing else but to be allowed to love you.

The letter . . . in my hand, in my possession . . . you, who understand what it is to love, will know how it is when one loves. Every trifling thing becomes a heaven and an earth.

The letter in my hand . . . that means holding minutes of your time. Time is life. So I possess a bit of your life. For you the

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minutes have vanished, like raindrops sunk in the ground; for me they have imperishable qualities; they are like seeds that send up shoots and more shoots, to be nourished by the sun and moisture of my love.

And what was there in the letter? I am not ashamed to answer, only word after word, like footprint after footprint on a muddy path. The written sheets contain hardly more than the blank ones. But I did not expect that they would, how could I expect it?

For you I am simply one among many. No, perhaps a little more, a tiny bit more. You said the first time we were alone together . . . not to me . . . that my nature was congenial to you. That meant you liked to be in my neighbourhood—my poor little neighbourhood. I feel such pity for myself when we are together. It is like being two people, one of whom has to do and say the very opposite of what the other would like to say and do. . . . Only when I go away from

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you and your glance follows me like a living shadow, that doesn't belong to me, I feel frightened and ashamed as a child. I am nervous about my walk, my figure, my movements, lest they should jar on you, and then I try to appear nonchalant. I talk and laugh, and am two people at once, one of whom watches the gaucheries of the other with sad eyes; the other who is quite at sea how she shall act to please you. And that is I myself, I, who in every one else's society, feel as free as the pollen of the buttercups as it flies over the fields. I talk on and on as if I must fill space with my words, fearful that the embarrassment of silence will turn my features to stone, fearful, too, of discovering a glint of boredom in your glance. Your glance! It is like a dark, slowly flowing river that bears your soul towards me.

When you look at me, a new world is born within and around me. It is as on that day when the Lord said, "Let there be light, and

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there was light." Your glance has divided me inwardly into light and darkness, which are a greater contrast than night and sun.

Your glance penetrates every drop of blood in my veins, as the sunshine soaks into the sleeping earth, and awakes to life its slumbering powers.

I know when your glance is resting on me like a tired hand on the arm of a chair. When you contemplate me without seeing me, because you are thinking of those cares which I divine, though I know nothing about them, something cries out within me, not from one place but from a thousand. Then warm founts of pity and grief overflow my inward being.

But don't be afraid, my friend, that I shall speak of what I suspect. If you would rather no one should know, I will be silent—like a flower at evening I will close my eyes, compelled by the darkness in which you envelop yourself.

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And I will go on seeming to understand nothing, nothing at all. But your mouth, beloved, your mouth, and your dear, beautiful hands betray you.

There is a quiver and trembling round the corners of your mouth as if the unspoken words lay there in ambush—and your hands look so helpless.

Your hands, whose grasp can be so majestically firm and strong, hang limply down, but you are not aware of it. At times your hands appear to me so full of "sin, sorrow, and peril," that I feel as if my soul were responsible for yours.

I talk to you like this, beloved, because you will never know. There are other days when your glance, as you look at me, is like a blue flower that blossoms in the sacred garden of dreams, but only because you are happy in yourself, only because of that. You have had some pleasant experience, or built up some new hope. . . . I think, then, that you

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have derived strength from the glance that is life to you, as yours is my own life's fountain.

At those times your glance flashes towards me, and a smile comes and goes on your lips. It comes from the foundation of your being, and is astonished at itself. At those times your figure is upright and elastic, and if you walk across a room you move with a rhythm that touches me like a song.

But, beloved . . . you have yet another, a third look . . . and this I recall when it grows dark. I fear it the most and love it the most. It's when you realise I am a woman . . . suddenly, as if a mask fell from my face, you realise that I am a woman, and not only a woman, but a woman meant for you. And the smile that then encloses me like a snare has not its origin in your consciousness and knowledge of my love, but its origin is in me because I am a woman. And then, of course, because in the kindness of your heart you are glad to give me the pleas-



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ure of remembering that I am a woman, your eyes fill with a misty twilight, and into this twilight I sink as into an everlasting night.

I feel your arm supporting my neck, your cheek's melancholy pressure. Shuddering we stand leaning against each other, like two pines of the forest, that for a short space a hurricane of storm wind has flung together only to separate them again.

All the time your smile is cold and meditative, and your glance is extinguished like a lamp that has consumed its last drop of oil. My poor heart tells me the reason—you are wondering at yourself for giving way to a mood which means so little to you.

But when, saddened, I try to move away, you again offer me your mouth as a friendly almsgiving. . . . The letter, the barren letter I hold it to my heart. I leave my house and go into the deepest part of the wood till I find a place solitary enough to lie down in. The letter has filled me with a joy that resembles

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the pungent fragrance of the pine needles carpeting the ground.

I open my letter, contemplate the two unwritten sides, and read once more the written sheets. . . . I begin a deliberate juggle with the words; I transpose them over and over again, read each letter separately, as if there were some sweet secret hidden in each, and a caress in every stroke of the pen. I can't help thinking there must be somewhere between the lines one single little word all for myself, that concerns me only.

Yet my joy goes down with the sun; the leaves cease to glow, and the darkness gathers in, and I sit with nothing but despondency in my lap.

Beloved, beloved! how kind you are!

I have lain awake all night with these words ringing in my head like a song through the darkness. How kind you are!

You gave me a whole evening. Don't deny it, for you know I collect all the minutes that

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you can spare from your superfluity. I glean them together, as Ruth gleaned wheat on Boaz's fertile acres. I hadn't dared to hope; not dared, you must believe me. I left the house alone with thoughts about you, but without the slightest shadow of a hope of seeing you. Then when I asked you imploringly, "Come to the meeting," you shook your head and answered, "I can't manage it."

But while I made my way through the lighted, busy streets, my heart became suddenly so heavy that I felt I couldn't go on. Yet I dragged myself there.

Many people greeted me, and said they were glad to see me. . . . I stood in the centre of a little group. Then all at once I felt *your* presence. I heard you coming . . . your step . . . it seemed as if you walked straight up to my very heart's door.

Smiling, you held out your hand to me . . . that alone was enough to gild my evening, but you stayed with me, stayed with *me*. We sat

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together, *we two*. The whole evening we sat together. While others discussed what they had come together to discuss, I sat apart and let myself be enthralled by a happiness which was almost more than I could bear.

Several times you leaned close to me to whisper something, and we both laughed and chatted about the others.

You are very fond of me as a friend with whom you can talk or be silent at your pleasure. If I were to cease to exist one day, you would—if only for a few minutes—feel the loss. Therefore I know that my life has not been lived in vain.

So, gradually, I have gained ground, step by step, and I don't worry you. That is true, is it not? I don't worry you? Rather than be a burden to you I would give up the joy that lies for me in seeing you now and then, and being sometimes where you are. It is that I long for nothing else, but to be allowed to love you.

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Sometimes when my thoughts soar to the cloudy pinnacles of bliss I have asked myself, what if the impossible were to happen, if you were to love me!

The clouds float on high, but when they are heavy with the moisture of earth, they weep till they are light again, and their tears water into fruitfulness the woods and meadows, while they themselves sail on yonder through the chill ether.

The clouds aspire to reach the height of the stars as my thoughts aspire to your love. But they know perfectly well that they are striving after the unattainable.

And when my thoughts have tarried a while up there in the sky, they become weighed down with depression and float softly earthwards, where they properly belong, and my heart itself drops like an anchor into the deep, quiet waters of sorrow.

But why do I talk of sorrow, I who am the

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happiest of the happy? . . . I didn't mean it, no, I didn't mean it in the least.

But if the impossible were to happen, the impossible . . .

If it could happen that you would love me? If your glance told me so just once.

I know what I should do—yes, I know. I should shut my eyes on that glance, so as never to let it go from me. I should leave my home, and my children, and go away. I should take leave of life, and fall asleep quietly, oh, so quietly, never to awake.

The darkness of the grave would have to be round me, so that not a sound disturbed my happiness.

To live and know that you loved me! I could not do it. My strength would be lacking. I can only love.

Henry said one day, "Don't touch any of my little bottles." I was staring at them so hard. Each of the little bottles contained the peace of the grave. But I must go on

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living for the sake of my little children, for Henry's sake. And why should I not go on living? I have no reason to wish to do otherwise. Yet I am not with them, though in their midst. When I move about in my rooms, when I talk to the children and Henry, I am not there. My eyes are seeking *him*, my ears strain after *him*. . . .

From the first moment we met, my *beloved*, you and I—I became a stranger amongst my own people. But no one knows it, except myself. And I feel that if I was bound by a thousand ties, I should break them all, where you, my love, were concerned.

I am so very much of a dreamer that it is difficult for me to write distinctly just what the relations are between us. Other thoughts perpetually throng upon me, and I have to strive hard not to pervert things or fabricate. And you will understand that I have not a jot or tittle of desire to fabricate. . . .

You must know how poor I am, in spite of

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my having home and family, and how rich, on the contrary, you make me, so that eternally I must love you. You must be told everything. You must be told how very well I know you don't care whether you are told or not, but I write not for your sake, but for the sake of my own love . . . You are so unspeakably good and kind. . . .

There was another evening, the evening of the fête. I asked you to give me a moment, one little moment for me alone, and in the middle of the revel and music we sat down in a corner together, at a little table. One gets distinct in calculating when the means are so sparingly few.

I seated myself at an angle, from which I could, to my heart's content, and eye's satisfaction, gaze right into your soul without any one seeing what I was doing.

You, you looked at me as if you were glad at my joy. You talked of all sorts of things.



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But every word that you let fall with a confidential emphasis as if it were between you and me alone, was like pure gold—a treasure to be added to my heart.

Not for long were we allowed to sit together undisturbed. Other people came up to us and jokingly teased us. They said that we too obviously sought each other's company. How stupid of them to say that, when it is only I who seek yours. And yet—don't be vexed with me—I liked them to say it. So I do.

And then it was that we came to discuss goodness, and I said so that every one could hear, that you were the best and finest of all the men I knew. My own husband stood near and smiled. He was so sure of me. . . . You, as well as the others, declared that there were men who might compare favourably with you. I could not bear to hear that. Softly in an undertone, I begged you to con-

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fess that you were the best, and you whispered, using "thou" for the first time, "For *thee* I am best."

But it is not true that you are only best for me. You are wonderfully good—your whole manner of life bears witness to it. Every one knows it, and every one knows that you suffer. No one can protect you from its being common knowledge that you have suffered deeply. Your heart lies in ruins. I ought to learn from you to forget myself, and never to speak of love which to you can never mean anything again. But I don't speak in words.

It was that evening you clasped me close to you, not because you loved me, but because you were so kind. While your lips sought mine I asked, "Then it is true that you love me a little?" and you answered in your infinite goodness, "Yes, it is true, you are very, very dear to me."

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But suppose I had then said, "Do you love me?" and you in your infinite goodness had replied, "Yes, I love you." What then? What then?

I dread the moment when I shall put this question to you. It lies in the womb of the future, waiting to reveal itself. May I have the power granted me never to speak, but if I do speak, may I understand absolutely that your answer is prompted by infinite goodness alone. Yet between us there is something that is all yours and mine. Something greater than love, for love aims at a goal, and sooner or later comes to a standstill. But that which exists between you and me revolves on and on like a silent star in its own distant sphere. Nobody and nothing can check its progress.

. . . I am not exigent. Your love will, I know, never be my possession. I don't expect it, and don't wish it. It is my greatest happi-

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ness that I have met you too late to be one of the many who have passed out of your heart into the cold, and everlasting yearning.

\* \* \*

To-day is my birthday, and each one is emulating the other to give me pleasure. The rooms are crammed with flowers and presents. Yet I am not joyous, and the whole affair seems very childish. How should you be able to remember that to-day is my birthday? *You* who know such heaps of people!

You will come to-night! I did not tell you intentionally that it was my birthday. . . . Perhaps because I hoped that you yourself would recollect the date. Last year I met you in the street on my birthday, and you told me that it was the anniversary of your father's death, and then I said that it was my birthday. You asked if you might send me some flowers, and I said no. How could I have explained it, receiving flowers from *you* who had never

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been in our house. And now, this evening you are coming! !

At first you did not wish to come, and it was sweet of you not to wish it. But as you don't—don't love me there is no reason why you should mind meeting my husband.

You are coming this evening. You are coming! Every time the bell rings my heart begins to beat faster, and every time I am disappointed. It is like standing in a brilliantly lighted room that becomes suddenly dark.

Once I received flowers from you which I never thanked you for. You know nothing about these flowers. Shall I tell you their story? But you mustn't laugh.

I always feel happy when I think of them. It is almost as if the flowers were standing again in the window, and I lying in my hypnotic sleep, unable to open my eyes but knowing all the time that your yellow orchids, trembling like a swarm of golden butterflies

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on their delicate stalks were standing there in the window. I don't suppose you gave a thought to whether they would reach me before or after the operation. Perhaps you merely rang up a florist on the telephone and ordered something specially beautiful to be sent to the Nursing Home on one or other of the days. And I am modest with good reason about questioning you.

I was in bed. No one was with me. The doctor had just been here and—as he considered his duty—explained for me, what my dear Henry had been so carefully keeping from me, that it was a matter of life and death. He had very little hope. But I was not afraid. I lay there and thought of you, of Henry and the children, and then again of you. I thought of how I had told you that I had to undergo that severe operation. I was bound to tell you—then, in case I died, I had to say good-bye to you.

You tried to turn it off with a joke, but in

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a few minutes you grew grave. You asked if I was nervous, and I begged you, if matters did not go well, to visit my grave, just once. Only once. It was very childish of me, but you did not laugh. You merely said, "To satisfy you I will promise, but I know you will live to visit my grave. . . ."

I have the power when I like, of bringing you before me in the flesh, so very much in the flesh, that I at times can hardly bear other people to be in the room. I want to be alone with you. After I came out of the operating theatre, I was alone with you every evening and every night.

I talked to you, I talked . . . and you were silent. I never was able to put many words into your mouth. But your attentive eyes rested on me . . . and you were there.

When the doctor had gone, I lay by myself for a long time. The nurse supposed naturally that I needed rest after my conversation with the doctor. I thought of you. I was so

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curiously restless, a sort of joyous, expectant restlessness. I kept looking at the door, as if every minute I should see you coming in.

I didn't really expect you. I knew, of course, that it was impossible, for many reasons. It would not occur to you to call on me. You might easily imagine that visits so shortly before the operation would not be permitted. There had been flowers in my room, sent by my friends, and many of Henry's patients.

But they had been taken away, because I must not be excited by their scent. I lay there and gazed at the door; my heart began to beat violently—no, not exactly to beat, but it felt as if something was entering it. You must not think, beloved, that I imagined all this afterwards. I felt—I could feel distinctly that some great joy was on its way to me. I heard the footsteps approaching in my heart, and then I heard them outside on the stairs. Nurses and visitors were coming and



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going all day on the stairs, but, nevertheless, I sat up in bed pressing my hand on my heart, for I knew, I knew, that this concerned you.

My nurse came in with a parcel. It seemed as if she, too, understood that this was something which I ought to see at once. She came quite close up to me with the box and, smiling, opened it deliberately, so deliberately that it looked as if she were teasing me. . . . "Let me open it," I begged, but no, she insisted on doing it herself.

I felt how the blood deserted my face. . . . "Give them to me!" I implored as if I were praying for my life. She handed me the long spray from which the flowers hung like gold sunbeams, and fluttered over the whiteness of the sheet. I held the spray in my hand.

When she was gone, I kissed every one of the sensitive flowers. And you were with me. All your steadfast calm was infused into my blood. Now I could die happy. The

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flowers were put in water and placed in the window. They were to stay there all night, I said, and no one objected. I had a light burning the whole night through, as if I were afraid of the dark. I dozed and woke, and dozed and woke. The flowers did not sleep, and they did not fly away.

You, you were with me!

Even if you never thought of me at all that night you were still with me. And, maybe, you dreamed of me. Men often dream of things that they haven't been thinking about. And you forgot your dream before you awoke.

The next morning when they came to fetch me, I besought so earnestly that my orchids might stand beside the bed. I submitted calmly to the anæsthetic. While the mask was being drawn over my face I thought of you, and it seemed as if the yellow, dewy petals began to dance over me.

Deeply I breathed in the fragrance, and I felt as if the flowers filled the room. They

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had increased from a swarm to countless swarms, and become a singing ocean of gold. And in the ocean I saw *your eyes*. You were with me, even if in thought you did not accompany me, yet you were there.

I woke up and my gaze met yours. My eyes were too tired to see much. Yet I saw the yellow flowers swaying on their stalks. They had come back. They had, with their loving souls, borne me company at the time, and now they had come back. Close to my eyes they seemed to be perpetually singing and making music. Yes, you were with me.

When the pain was most acute it was just as if they flew away, and dispersed at the sound of my groans. I quite understood it. They were like you. You, too, hate the thought of sickness. You, too, cannot bear people to be ill. So I tried to smile at them, and to act as if I did not feel the pain.

. . . Your flowers . . . your exquisite, blessed flowers . . .

## ELSIE LINDTNER

To-day is my birthday, and you are coming, yet I am not happy.

All my best friends are coming. I shall sit at the same table as you! You will sit on my right hand, for you are the only one who comes for the first time. It is not wrong, it cannot be wrong. But if it is wrong, then punish me, let me suffer for it; I am ready.

I said that I must rest before the guests arrive. I must be alone for a little to collect myself for the joy that is greater than joy.

For my joy is more than bliss. There is nothing so great, there cannot be anything greater than my joy.

The flowers are risen from the dead. The yellow butterfly blossoms.

\* \* \*

I almost wish it was over. I don't know myself what it is, but I wish it was over.

*That*, I wish over, and I don't know what it is. I see something beyond the barrier,

## ELSIE LINDTNER

and I don't see it. It is not death, but there is something that hurts more than death.

And the evening was the happiest of my life.

Perhaps it is nothing at all. Perhaps it is only my heart breaking for happiness, but can it hurt so much when one's heart breaks for happiness?

It was at the moment when you went out at the door. Magna Wellmann turned her head and said, "That was *the* evening of the year," and you nodded. Then was it. It felt as if all my joy had suddenly been hemmed up in a coffin and couldn't breathe. Henry asked, "Are you ill, you look so strange, and you have been beaming the whole evening as if you had light inside you. . . ." That was true. I had light, yes, light burning within me, and now it is extinguished.

I must gather myself together. I must cherish and hoard my happy evening. It is

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

wrong to think such things, but I am glad that Henry had to read the treatise this evening. I mean . . .

You led me to the table. You sat on my right, and you were so calm. You are always so calm. Why should you not be calm, you are not in love.

You invited me to drink, and I who never drink wine, drank with you, only a sip. It was . . . no, I cannot speak of it. But now I understand that clergymen really believe it when they say, "This is the body and blood of Christ."

No one could read my thoughts.

Now I know what it is that I have lacked hitherto, and I am glad that I have lacked it.

You made a speech in my honour. It was so natural that you should. You led me to the table, and it was my birthday. For me it was a sacred miracle. The words you spoke have gone to sleep in my heart. When I die

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

one day in my coffin, and my children weep over me, they will arise and whisper and sing as your yellow flowers sang when I was ill.

I hold so fast to my happiness. But my hands are weak, and it slips through them like running sand.

The hours go as they came.

Why do you rend my dream in twain? Why do you thrust a knife in my heart? I have never thought of being your mistress. I only grant you every delight there is. But why in this night, in this night, when I woke and clung to my happiness! When Magna Wellmann telephoned me to-day, I knew everything. She said nothing and I asked no questions.

My yellow orchids hang on their stalks like dead butterflies. I have forgotten to give them water.

Forgive me! I am not. I won't be like this, and now it is over. It hurts no longer. I am well, like the little boy who was run

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

over the day before yesterday. He cried and moaned that he was going to die, and all the time was quite unhurt.

You walked over my heart, and I thought it must die, but there is nothing the matter with it.

It is months since I wrote to you last; I simply felt I couldn't. I have been like one scared. Why do people speak so often without thinking? One lets fall a word quite indifferently, that stabs the heart of another like a poisoned arrow. I have been half distracted by anxiety. I have listened to all the gossip. I am sick from disquietude. My youngest child has been ill, days and nights. I have watched beside him, expecting every hour that death would come, and yet in the middle of my fear of death my thoughts have been incessantly with you.

I wouldn't believe it. . . . But if it is true. . . . Beloved, I am so saddened, I don't know



## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

whether I ought to tell you why, or whether you would tolerate my intruding into the habits of your daily life. But I am not only depressed, for if that was all I could bear it in silence. No, I am frightened, frightened, frightened. I cannot sleep for anxiety.

You wrote last year to tell me yourself that your doctor had forbidden you to resort to the strong remedy which had become a necessity to you; that you were obeying, but suffering horrible pain in consequence. That first awakened my anxiety. Many, many times I felt as if I were running my head against the blank wall which separates life from death. . . . And yet, it seemed to me that there was strength in the touch of your hands, strength that could grapple with any illness, strength in your hands, your glance, your smile. Then one day something happened that it took weeks to get out of my head. I sat with you and between us was built the usual bridge of kindness and confidence. Your smile came

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

over the bridge and met mine. We played with words as children in a meadow play with flowers. Your hand lay on mine so firmly and tenderly. I grasped at that moment why men honour so much the idea of a foundation stone. I felt my hand, too, was the corner-stone in an eternal building. So proud was I that your hand rested on mine, so sure, firmly and tenderly, and then suddenly, with such terrible suddenness, that my heart nearly stopped beating, your smile froze and died; your eyes became vacant, glazed; your face was not only strange—would it had only been that—it was so changed that you wouldn't have recognised it yourself in the looking-glass.

In that moment—I can't say whether they were moments or minutes—you were not master of your body, neither were you ruler of your soul. And then you came to yourself. But I left you and cried. My tears were cold and made me freeze. Soon after I had to go away on a journey. Beloved, beloved, how

## ELSIE LINDTNER

full of pain love is! Every day, every hour when I strolled in the garden among my flowers which I planted there myself, which stand there mysteriously waiting and watching for your coming, I saw before me a shadow that proceeded from my own distraught mind . . . your dear face with the relaxed expression, and the glazed, fixed eye.

The pain which I experienced then has been carried about in my heart for years, and was day by day increased and nourished by my anxiety.

But then your letters came, like stars dropping from the sky in the still, dark night . . . and once more I gained strength and courage to look life in the face. *Life*—that is what *you* are for me.

I could fancy every one dying round me, even my own darling children, all that was near and dear to me; all that peoples the earth, and I could fancy the houses falling, day and

## ELSIE LINDTNER

night ceasing—but I cannot picture life without you.

I cannot, and I *will not*. . . .

The summer passed, and with the falling leaves I returned to your neighbourhood. You were, to all appearances the same, only rather paler, rather softer in your manner. Your hands were the same, your lips sought mine. I asked you no questions. Dare any one call to the man walking on a rope over the abyss, whether he feels giddy? I asked you nothing. But others talked about you to me. And all, all said the same. Don't you see how changed he is? And they spoke of the strong remedy that had become indispensable to you, of the remedy by the help of which you maintain your mask of mental equilibrium, a mask through whose holes your own tormented soul stares out into vacancy.

Now I have come to it. I have come to it. Please do not be angry, or hurt, but let

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

me say what I can no longer carry about with me unsaid. Try if you cannot, slowly and by degrees, break yourself of the habit of resorting to means which, instead of strengthening, undermine your health. In the name of my love I ask you to do this, and you must not think that I ask for my sake alone. Then if it happened that I was going to die, and knew that I was going to die to-day, so that I should never see you, or hear your voice again, I should still make the same request. Why will you be kind to every one but to yourself? A doctor said to me about you— No, those are words that may not be repeated. . . .

Now say with a smile that I am conjuring up bogies, that my feelings have got the better of me, and perhaps you are right, but, beloved, death is not the worst. Do you understand me now?

I sit here and write in the bright sunshine. My children play round my skirts, and chatter and ask me why I am crying. . . .

*ELSIE LINDTNER*

Well, now it is said, and now that I have said it, I dare not let you read what I have written.

But I will keep this letter with the rest of *your* letters, with the letters which you have never received. Should the day ever come when I have sufficient courage you shall read it.

Only this one, of all the letters.

AN UNSENT LETTER FROM LILI  
ROTHE TO PROFESSOR ROTHE.

**H**ENRY, I had on my mind to write to you and, for the last time, ask you to forgive me, but I know that it is no use. Perhaps your forgiveness could do me no good now. It is too late. I have suffered so much. I cannot bear more. But this letter contains nothing but the truth, and it is the last letter that I shall write.

Henry, I have never denied my love for you. I have never forgotten you, and never deceived you. If I am to die now, because I long for the sleep, which while I live, cannot mercifully be granted to me, you must believe my poor last words.

I don't know whither I am going, but even if I knew for certain that I should reach the open gates of Paradise, I could not cross the

## ELSIE LINDTNER

threshold. So long as you had not forgiven me in your heart, eternal peace would not encompass me. And if I knew, he for whose sake I have caused you such great trouble that it casts a shadow behind and dims all that was once radiant and happy, if I knew that he was standing ready to receive me with those words which up till this hour I have never heard him utter, "Welcome, my beloved," it would be impossible for me to follow him into everlasting bliss. Consciousness of guilt would prevent it.

In the years when I loved you alone, I was happy; when he came into my life and I loved you both, my happiness increased with my love, and I did not feel guilty. I was so unspeakably happy. I loved you, and I loved him. You are a doctor, and when women are ill you can make them well, but for my sickness you had no panacea to prescribe.

And I cannot do what you desire of me;



## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

I cannot say that my love for him is dead. Love cannot die, when once it has lived.

Henry, when you took me back, I entreated you to ask me no questions, and you asked none. But your eyes asked and the walls asked, and everything round me asked questions. I do not wish to have any more secrets from you. Yet you never can understand what I am now going to say.

He did not know me when I came to him, and he died without having recognised me. But it made me happy to be with him. When the others were asleep, and it was all quiet, I heard him mention a name. Not my name. He did not love me, you see. Every time he mentioned that other name I felt I was expiating some of my guilt towards you. I sat and listened, the nights were so long, but my name never came. The name of the one he loved, the names of others, but mine never.

One night I fell asleep and dreamed that he called me. I awoke, and he lay dead.

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

And now I shall never find out whether that was only a dream or something more.

I have thought so much over the question whether other women are the same as I am. Were I strong enough I would go about and look till I found one who could tell me truthfully that she had loved two men, loved both with her whole heart and soul. I would then beg her to go to you and explain how that is something one cannot help, cannot fight against, and cannot kill.

**M**Y nun has espoused a husband, and I have been to call on the young couple. He has only one eye, is superannuated, and has warts in his ears. He is a hod carrier. When she contemplates him she feels as if heaven were opening before her.

She comes from a good family, and has had a good education; he is ignorant and stupid, but he seems to appreciate her adoration. I had a ticket for "Lohengrin" this evening, but I am not inclined to go.

After all, I can understand it. Once I should have thought it silly, but my ideas have undergone a change. When I reflect on it there is really only one condition that can be called unhappy, and that is loneliness. Loneliness on a desert island, loneliness in a great city, loneliness in married life. . . . Loneliness.

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

For this reason all living beings crowd together. The animals seek each other. The faded leaves, as they flutter down from the trees, wed in the hour of their destruction.

She feels that she has been cheated for all the years of her convent life, has loved without an object. She has cast off her shackles, and achieved her liberty. The thought of a joint life with some one, that she may have pined for vaguely in the convent, became, out in the world, the highest thing to aim at. In her excessive modesty she humbly accepted the first thing that offered. Surely there is nothing ridiculous in that.

But I am alone. I am solitary.

\* \* \*

God in heaven, what have I done? There he lies asleep, as if he were never going to wake. Such a little gnome. But I couldn't do anything else, and behind all my anxiety and fidgetting I have a feeling that for the

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

first time in my life I have done what is right.

For it was not unpremeditated, or was it? Do I know? A transformation has been going on lately within me. But when did it begin, and where will it lead me? If I only had some one whom I could consult, but there is no one. I have broken all my old ties. I stand quite alone. Even Jeanne. . . . Jeanne must be told as soon as possible, but, of course, she will think it is nothing except one of my whims in which I indulge to kill time.

When I ask myself deep down in my heart why I did it, there is no answer, and, meanwhile, the boy is lying in my bed. I have slept an hour or two here on this chair without knowing it. The windows are wide open, yet every minute I inhale a horrible smell of spirits . . . a little boy of seven! How am I to know whether he is seven, five, or nine?

I must collect myself. This hour may decide the whole course of my life. I have only to hold the telephone receiver to my ear, and

## ELSIE LINDTNER

directly the house-porter will call in the police. Before noon the boy will be gone, and I shall never see him again.

\* \* \*

Why should it concern me? It would be sheer folly if I gave way to a sickly sentimentality and wished to keep this small tramp. Small as he is, he seems to be endowed with every vice.

I feel as if I had dreamed it all, and not seen it with my eyes. . . . And it all comes of my freak of using the subway under the river instead of taking a motor. What induced me to waste time in that fashion? I who, of all others, detest subterranean zigzagging?

Was it a presentment? Did I expect a sensation, and wish to gloat over the sight of roofless night-wanderers, who for five cents travel backwards and forwards by this route all day? One's way of living and thinking is different in New York from what it is in

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

great European capitals. We don't follow each other like sheep. We think more for ourselves.

I felt so tired inwardly on the journey, so utterly without an anchor. I tried to fall asleep before we reached the river to escape hearing the ghastly rushing sound in the air behind. The boy had seen me at once. I believe I inspired him with a certain awe. My clothes probably were too smart for him.

He hurled himself past me without calling out rude words, or making grimaces. I could not take my eyes off him. At first I thought it was one of the dwarfs out of the Hippodrome, and I squirmed with disgust. Then I saw that it was a child. A child sick with a fever which his senses could not master. I, like the other passengers, thought him mad, till we grasped what was the matter with him.

He jumped on ladies' laps, and spat in their faces; he kicked gentlemen's legs violently

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

with his heels. When the guard caught hold of his wrists and commanded him to be quiet, he bit the man so hard he was obliged to let him go. At the next station he was ejected. But directly the train was in motion again, he swung himself on to the car, and this process was repeated at every station. No one knew how to cope with him; no one knew where he came from, or to whom he belonged. Suddenly he began to sing, what, I couldn't understand, but from the expression on the faces of the men present, and from his own gestures, I gathered that it was something indecent.

How shall I describe my feelings? Were they prompted by horror, repulsion, or compassion? I must try to analyse them clearly. . . . I felt as if I had brought this wretched creature into the world, as if I were responsible for him. I experienced a mother's agony and a mother's boundless tenderness.

Directly it became plain to me that the child was not speaking in the delirium of



## ELSIE LINDTNER

fever, but of drunkenness, I had to bite my lips till they bled, so as not to cry out. Then the boy came to me, and threw himself across my lap. There he stayed, nestling his head against me, and went to sleep.

\* \* \*

Were I to act now sensibly and as common reason demanded, I should send the child back whence he came, though I don't know in the least where that is. . . . The child who has awakened the most sacred feeling in my poor, withered heart. . . . The child who is to blame for my having shed, for the first time in my life, tears of joy.

When I offered to take Jeanne's child, I had my reasons at my fingers' ends, but they were not honourable ones. I wanted to start for myself an interest in life. I started from the hypothesis that what filled the lives of so many women might equally well fill mine. I wanted to take Jeanne's child, in the same way

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

as five years before I had taken her . . . as an experiment, a distraction.

But it was not so to-night. This small boy had kissed my hands, and I had blessed him.

I have heard somewhere of a holy man who met once a little child who was tired. He lifted him on to his shoulders and carried him over a river, but on the way the child grew and became heavier and heavier, while the man sank deeper and deeper . . . All that, however, doesn't matter.

I took him home with me. Here you can do what you like. My proceeding excited no remark. A stranger asked if he should fetch me a carriage, and we drove home.

I must, of course, make inquiries about his antecedents. He says nothing himself. He woke up when I struck a light, but he wouldn't tell me his name even. The people in the train thought he was one of those outcast children without parents who live from hand to mouth by selling newspapers, and stealing

## ELSIE LINDTNER

from the banana carts, and who pass the night on the river's bank or in empty wagons.

I haven't succeeded yet in getting his boots off. Though they have evidently once belonged to a grown-up, they are so tightly laced on his little legs that they can only be moved by cutting. He must have worn them day and night for months.

\*

\* \*

What will be the end of it? I daren't think, and I daren't act. I keep saying to myself without ceasing, the same thing, "Suppose he is taken away from me?" and I seem to see into the future, his life ending in crime, his death taking place in prison.

I intend to sacrifice my own life for this child's . . . but is that sufficient? Can that avert his fate?

My beautiful, beautiful boy! He is asleep. I have locked both doors and sit with the key in my pocket. Every quarter of an hour I

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

look in at him; he smiles in his sleep as only innocent children smile. Then suddenly he clenches his little fists and his mouth becomes so distorted and ugly that I have to turn away. What can he be dreaming about?

Help me, help! To whom am I praying? I, who am without faith, and without hope. But I am not without love. No longer without love; for I love this poor, miserable child.

Could I but give him back his innocence! . . . Has he never been innocent like other children? Was he contaminated from the first by the two creatures who gave him life? Is it in my power to atone for others' sins against him?

I wonder why he tried to run away to-day? Where did he want to go, and what was in his mind? If I had not got him back, God knows, I could not have faced another day.

\*  
\*   \*   \*

## ELSIE LINDTNER

I sat with him on my lap, and he looked up at me as if he would ask, "What are you going to do with me?"

His childish gaze was so suspicious and hard. I told him that I wanted to be his mother and to live for nothing else but to make him happy. All the time his little hands were feeling about to find my pocket. I pretended not to see, and smiling angelically, he plunged his hand after my purse, and began to fidget with it till it opened. My heart beat so that I could hear it distinctly resound in my ears.

Is it to be wondered at that he steals? He has known what it is to starve. But now I give him everything that heart can desire. I have bought him a little purse of his own, and filled it with money. Yet still his tiny face retains its expression of desperate greed when he sees me take out money. When will this alter?

And he asks me if I have bought him. Or

## ELSIE LINDTNER

have been given money to keep him. He does not remember that blessed, thousand-fold blessed, night when he took my heart by storm, and transformed me into a real human being. . . .

I wanted to test him, so to-day I went without lunch, explaining to him that I had no more money, but he was to eat, I could go without it. He nodded, and without troubling about me at all, ate up his lunch.

\* \* \*

Kelly. That's his name. Kelly! or he says it's his name. He has been with me now for six days, and only to-day he told me what he was called. Well, it is at least a beginning. I am thankful for little.

I dare not hesitate any longer. If I could, I would travel off with him like a thief with his booty, even if somewhere a mother sat and wept for him. No, no! I wouldn't rob a mother of her child. But I needn't be afraid.

## ELSIE LINDTNER

Kelly's whole bearing tells me that he has been for a long, long time alone in the world. Enquiries will be only a matter of form, and then I can adopt him properly. He will be mine by law.

\* \* \*

It is quite a matter of indifference to me if people shake their heads at my insane action. How should they know that Kelly alone, only this boy with the vicious little face and criminal glance is the source of all my bliss and riches in this life? But it distresses me when people talk about it in his presence, and I cannot prevent them shaking their heads. Kelly understands what they mean. He seems conscious that his brow is branded with the mark of Cain.

\* \* \*

To-morrow we are going to the Children's Court; I have written to Mr. Rander. He

## ELSIE LINDTNER

is said to be one of the cleverest child-psychologists in America.

He has replied that I need cherish no fears. So long as my love is sufficiently great . . . my love. . . . Yes, my love is great enough to bear the strain.

\* \* \*

Why had that to happen just to-day, when I was feeling in such good heart? It's only a trifle, certainly. He may not have thought what he was doing.

It's a necessity of children's nature to be destructive. They are cruel without being conscious of it. What, after all, do I care about the stupid cacti? I would have made him a present of all of them. But it was the glance of his! The sly, uncanny glance when I said, "But, Kelly, why have you cut my flowers in pieces?"

\* \* \*



## ELSIE LINDTNER

I am doing it entirely on my own responsibility. I should do it, even if the whole world cried out, "Leave it alone, it will prove your ruin!" I should do it. Even if I could see into the future, and behold my boy a full-fledged criminal sentenced to death. . . . I consecrate my life to him, my poor, squandered life. But it isn't poor now. I am rich. I am a mother!

\* \* \*

Mr. Rander meant well, I daresay, when he said, "Don't do it. Take any of them, only not him!" And he related what he knew.

As if a single spoken phrase could dissolve the bond my heart has entered into voluntarily.

"Born, double-dyed criminal." Nevertheless, I will educate myself to be a worthy mother to him.

DEAR MAGNA WELLMANN,

“From earth thou comest, to earth thou shalt return. . . .” These words of Scripture occurred to me when I read your letter. That is the eternal circle . . . in this case the circle of your family. Your grandfather was a renegade from the calling of his forefathers when he became a townsman. Your father degenerated, and now you have gone back to the land.

Magna, Magna, I admire you. Of course, I am heart and soul for the enterprise. In this manner my money will become a breathing, living entity, doing its own work, and reaping its own reward. Don't talk about being cautious. I am running no risks. I know what I am about. Your lawyer's letter informs me in business language that the undertaking is “sound,” besides I am not giving the whole or even half the capital.

## ELSIE LINDTNER

I need no assurances that you will carry the thing through. But read before you begin a little book by Flaubert. I don't mind betting you have never heard of it. It is called, "Bouvard et Pécuchet." A prospective agriculturist can learn a good deal from it. It's splendid that Jarl is so keen on farming. But you won't surely let him put his hand to the plough, and work in the fields from the start, will you? The boy is only seventeen, and I hope, too, that his mother isn't going to begin at once digging turnips and milking cows. I should not care to set foot in a cowshed—it's a thing I have never done. But all the same I shall enjoy having letters yards long about all your first experiments and blunders.

You mustn't take it too much to heart that Agnete is cool towards you. The poor child has a dash of prudishness in her, inherited from her mother! When she has children of her own she will be different.

## ELSIE LINDTNER

Your account of the scandal was rich! Especially do I like that remark of a friend, "She might at least have had the tact to say that it was an adopted child." I read between the lines that you have not passed through this humiliation without it's having left scars behind. But, Magna, nothing is in vain. You can afford to pay the cost of your happiness. I am reminded of a little story about you which used to be told in our "set." It related to the way in which you conquered Professor Wellmann's heart. You were at a party, and had been so bored you had spoken to no one. There was something to drink in big, tall glasses. Suddenly in an ebullition of superfluous strength you bit the glass with your teeth and bit a piece out of it. Professor Wellmann sat with distended eyes and open mouth, and watched you.

And on his way out of the house he remarked to a not very discreet friend, "She, the girl who bit the glass, shall be my wife!"

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

The story may or may not be true, but it is characteristic of you all the same.

I can see you in hobnail boots, and a smock, tramping over the fields, superintending the plough and the breeding of cattle.

I have very little to tell about myself. Since I linked my fate to Kelly's I live in a new world. Every day that goes by I come nearer to myself, but I cannot write about it. It is too sacred a subject. Troubles which were unknown to me before have taken up their continued abode within me, but joys which were equally strange keep watch over me with drawn swords. Magna, I ask you, can the woman who has brought her own child into the world experience greater bliss and greater torment than I, to whom my boy was given by chance?

With a thousand loving remembrances,

Your

ELSIE LINDTNER.

## THE WHITE VILLA.

**D**EAR JEANNE,  
As you will see from this heading,  
we are now at home again.

*We*, and at *home* again!

My home is where Kelly is, and Denmark was never his home. But for his sake, I have uprooted once more. I did not think such a big, big town was good for him. The island here is certainly small enough.

Oh, if you could see how it looks now! I was determined to be the first with Kelly to enter the house, since you and I left it together, how many years ago?

The carpets were in tatters. The window panes were beaten in, either by the wind or vagabonds. Dead leaves and dead flies lay about the floors. My beautiful pieces of furniture were mildewed from damp . . .

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

one or two of the chairs had collapsed; the chintz coverings were moth-eaten. My bedroom—my ridiculous bedroom—was the most deplorable of all. It must have been struck by lightning, otherwise I don't understand how the mirrors got smashed, and the rain and snow lay congealed on my bed.

Kelly laughed, and rushed from room to room, and in the end I laughed, too. Then Kelly got hold of the mad idea that instead of putting up at the inn, we should turn in here the first night. I half think he contemplated a sort of burglarious attempt on the deserted house. I yielded, of course. Never in my life have I seen any one more industrious and handy than this boy when he likes. He ran about pumping water and sweeping floors, and made all straight, God knows how. Tea was prepared! ante-diluvian sugar and a canister of Albert biscuits. He ushered me into the large parlour where my piano, my poor, wretched, beautiful piano, had been standing

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

all these years, the prey of wind and rain, till it hasn't a sound left in its body from hoarseness—and then he brought in the tea. I won't go so far as to say that it tasted clean or nice, and the biscuits were musty, but Kelly's hand had prepared it.

And we slept together in the same bed, in your bed, Jeanne, in yours! It was the only one in which the blankets were dry. I wanted to lie on a sofa with a rug, but Kelly would cuddle up beside me.

Jeanne, I—really I, your fond, old traveling companion, am now once more “at home,” and I lay awake the whole night thinking over my happiness.

Kelly slept in my arm, and my arm, of course, went to sleep, but no other part of me slept . . . and Kelly woke with my arm round him.

Then we went to “The Jug,” and put up there for a fortnight till the whole place was made habitable. I have no Jeanne—I do my



## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

own hair, and make myself beautiful for my boy. Alack! it is hard work to inspire him with any desire to make himself presentable.

I am thinking of finding a tutor for him. He ought not to be allowed to run wild and devour sensational American novelettes—of which there are none in Denmark—and remain ignorant of all other subjects.

Forgive me, Jeanne, but I have only one thought, and that is Kelly. He fills my life at all points, so that everything else now has to give way to him.

He has a craze for collecting snails and slugs, which he brings into the house and lets crawl about on the white window-sills. I must own it makes a horrible mess, but Kelly may do anything. Only I draw the line at helping him to collect his snails, for, much as I should like to oblige him, it is too disgusting.

Now in exchange for these confidences, tell me all your news. It was indeed a piece of

## ELSIE LINDTNER

good fortune that Malthe's design took the prize. And in Paris, too! You will, I suppose, stay there the two years. Or are you still the incorrigible nomads who prefer to travel about with your houses on your backs, with your trunks and perambulator—to settling down quietly in a refined, comfortable home. Don't work yourself to shreds, Jeanne. Remember that life is long, and that you mustn't grow old and ugly. I concluded that you are doing everything in your power fairly to spoil your excellent husband. You go to market. You pack the boxes, take the tickets, and accompany your husband to the museums where you make drawings for him, and you look after the children. Jeanne! Jeanne! take thought for your hair, and be careful of your hands.

And don't forget your happy *home-flown* friend,

ELSIE LINDTNER.

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

DEAR GOOD MAGNA,

That this notion should have occurred to you, and that you should have the courage to carry it out—. But ought I to offer up this sacrifice to you, and can I relinquish Kelly? The last few nights have been long and sleepless; only when dawn begins to glimmer can I bring my confused thoughts into any order, and then it seems as if I had found a solution which is the right one. I fall asleep, and when I wake up again, everything is as unsettled as ever.

I don't know my way in or out. Magna, it's not selfishness which makes me dread letting Kelly out of my hands—the day does not seem far off when I shall be forced to live under another roof from that which shelters him, and that is why I don't want to die.

My every thought is dedicated to him for whom and with whom I now live, and so I will continue to live without complaint so

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

long as life is granted me. I have looked it all in the face, and have recoiled, shuddering, at the petrifying horror of impossibilities, but I have made my resolve. So long as I inhabit the earth Kelly has a human being who stands in the place of mother to him.

I am not afraid to make any sacrifices. I shrink only from the thought of shirking the responsibility. From the day Kelly came into my life I have made myself answerable for his actions and conduct. Would it not be cowardice and treachery if I now said, "The yoke has become too burdensome, now I will shunt it on to the shoulders of another"?

And yet, Magna, your plan seems to me the one possibility of salvation.

Before I express my hearty thanks, and confide my boy to your care, I must tell you something which I have been compelled to keep to myself till now. Kelly has before been taken care of by others. By force of circumstances. He tried—remember he was only nine years

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

old—to burn me. Of course no one suspected him, otherwise the police would not have been asked to investigate the affair, but then it was brought to light, and he was taken away from me. I could have murdered them for taking him. . . . It is hard, even now, years after, to talk about it. My one idea was to find a means of getting him back. In America everything possible is done to save children whose feet are set on the downward path to crime. And it is done with a tenderness and love which is marvellous, but I didn't know it. I thought of what I had read in the papers at home about reformatories for children, about floggings and starvation, and lockings-up in dark cellars. I was ready to help Kelly to escape till the first time that they gave me permission to visit him.

There was no wall round the institution, not even a railing. The main building abutted on the high road, and from there you

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

could see the heaps of smaller red houses resembling a town of villas.

As I came up to the inspector's dwelling, I was almost run down by a crowd of boys headed by a small negro, who were having a race.

Just as I entered the door, I heard an outcry which made my heart stand still. I thought it was one of the boys being punished. But the inspector showed me from the window what the noise meant. The boys were playing at fire, and at that moment they were letting the hose play on the inspector's house. My little Kelly—in oilskins and a helmet on his head—held the hose.

And I was told that of the six hundred boys who are in the reformatory many of them on account of gross misconduct, for which but for their tender years, they would have been sentenced to a long period of imprisonment, not a single one had been guilty of doing anything wrong during his detention here. Pun-

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

ishments such as thrashing and being put on bread and water and under arrest, simply do not exist. The boys live in their little villas, twelve in a batch, under the supervision of a pair of foster-parents. The only punishment is that a boy who has been disobedient or lazy gets no cake at five o'clock tea, and is not given permission to sit with the others at the large flower-decked table, but has to sit alone at a small table. And he mayn't lie before the fire at dusk and listen to fairy-tales.

No mother could have had more delightful letters from her child than I had from Kelly during that year. If I had only been as wise then as I am now, I should have let him stay there as long as the inspector would have kept him.

All the small "prisoners" were taught in succession various industries which they might choose themselves. I saw them baking, ironing, washing, carving, carpentering, binding books, making clothes, and toys, and

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

I saw them planting trees, ploughing, and, Magna, I saw them milking cows. But I was a foolish mother. I didn't want my boy brought up to a trade; I imagined it was my duty to develop his great gifts in a different direction.

So after a year he was sent back to me. But the inspector warned me that there would be a lapse. In two months it came. Kelly disappeared. I tore about like a maniac hunting for him everywhere. I don't believe there was a beer-cellar, a common lodging-house, or a thieves' kitchen that I didn't search. He was traced through the scar on his forehead, and I recovered him. But how?

The Kelly who for twelve months had been living a model life among six hundred little abandoned chaps, had plotted with a group of homeless playmates to commit a crime so diabolical and remorseless that at first I refused to believe his brain could have hatched



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it. By the train between Philadelphia and New York travels every day a crowd of millionaires who come to do their business on the Stock Exchange. The other boys were, through all sorts of tricks, to distract the attention of the signalman while Kelly was to switch on the signals so that another train would come into collision with the train from Philadelphia. After the collision they meant to plunder the dead bodies!

It's true, Magna; now say, no! you dare not take Kelly under your roof to associate with Oluf. I can't help it, it was my duty to tell you all. My friend, Judge Rander, in Children's Court, helped me in every way. He procured for me leave to travel with Kelly out of the country on a verbal and written oath that I would never bring him back. That is why I lived two years, summer and winter, in my White Villa with Kelly and a tutor. I was afraid to let him come near the town, and yet the child needed companions.

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

So at last I ventured to migrate to a town, with the result that Kelly in two years was expelled from three schools. Can you still have the courage, Magna, to let the innocent child, offspring of your heart, become Kelly's play-fellow? And if you are so courageous, how shall I be able to exonerate myself if you come to me one day and say, "Kelly has corrupted my boy"?

I put the words into your mouth, Magna.

Say no, while there is still time. You are strong, stronger than any other woman I know, since you have found yourself again through strenuous exertion and labour. But there are powers that the strongest cannot conquer.

Behind my fears about your saying yes, lies the burning wish that you will, but how shall I ever find words to thank you?

Of course, I realise what it will mean if Kelly from now onwards takes up his abode with you, and directly after his confirma-

## ELSIE LINDTNER

tion leaves off school. It's not what Kelly is to be, but *how* he becomes what he is, that is going to be for me the main question. I fold my hands in my lap, and I confess my powerlessness.

Make Kelly a man. Make Kelly a good man.

You will understand, Magna, that I could not say all this if we stood face to face. While I have been writing Kelly has been several times to the door. He wants to know what I am doing. Every time I feel tempted to lay down my pen to enjoy his society. He asked me the other day, "Mother, do you believe that people's fate is pre-ordained?" What could he have meant by it? I dared not ask him. He went on his knees, buried his head in my lap, and cried bitterly.

Magna, don't keep me long in uncertainty. At least promise me that.

Your

ELSIE LINDTNER.

## ELSIE LINDTNER

I have begun to darn Kelly's stockings. Why did I never think of it before?

He was whitewashing the attic with Magna, and I saw that one of his stockings was without a heel. I actually blushed, I felt so ashamed. The boy, of course, doesn't trouble about such trifles, and Magna, splendid creature, has enough to do. I don't believe she would mind a bit going about with holes in her own stockings.

In the country it doesn't matter so much, but still—

She simply laughed at me when I asked to be allowed to look after his clothes, and I didn't quite know how to explain why I wanted to do it. But Magna is so clever, and when I was seated comfortably she brought me out a whole bundle. She has done the same for her own children. I am convinced that she would not let any one else darn Oluf's stockings.

I don't find it easy. I have quite forgotten

## ELSIE LINDTNER

the proper way of doing it, which I learnt at school. And I haven't thought anything about darning stockings since.

But I take no end of trouble, and it is a wonderful feeling to sit out here on the balcony with a whole pile of big, big stockings in front of me—Kelly has positively a gigantic foot. My dear little balcony. It's to me what an airship is for young, impatient folks. I sit so serenely in my charming, soft seat, between sweet-peas and nasturtiums, and beneath me streams by the current of life with its men and beasts.

\* \* \*

It amuses me to see how skilfully Richard's eldest can drive an automobile. If only he can avoid accidents.

Richard himself is aging, but his little wife sits so upright in the car. She wears well.

Since Richard caught sight of me one day

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

by chance he always looks up and bows, and then we all bow, . . . I overhear the lanky youth say, "Papa, we are passing your old wife," and then they laugh.

Yes, I should like to see the home in the old Market Place once more. Probably I should hardly recognise it, or perhaps Richard, from long habit, has kept things much the same.

The eldest son is to succeed to the business, of course, but the second looks to me so dandified. I know this for certain that none of Richard's sons will ever work out in the fields in clogs and woollen shirts. And their mother will never have the joy of darning stockings with holes in them as big as goose's eggs. While I sit with a pair of these coarse, huge, manly socks in which my hand is absolutely drowned, I feel to the full extent a mother's glorious rights. I only wish the holes were double the size, so that the time they take to mend lasted longer.

I have been and bought the pan for cook-

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

ing oxeyes in, and I have promised Kelly and Oluf that every time they come they shall have oxeyes baked in butter. Magna requires nothing but her horrid nut-suet which has no flavour. She alone can eat it. Dear, dear boys.

DEAR AGNETE,

It was well that you wrote to me this time, and not to your mother. You are not to trouble her with your unhappy affairs, do you understand? Every time that she gets a letter from you she shuts herself up and cries. Lately I have read quite a number of your letters, and I must confess that I was not pleased with them.

At one time you presumed to sit in judgment on your mother's life, and now you blame her because yours is a failure. You have no right to do it.

You cannot justly lay your married wretchedness at either your mother's or your hus-

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

band's door. Its origin is to be sought in a train of circumstances. You must know, though you seem to have forgotten it, that it was not your mother who gave in to your desire to go to the French Convent School. It was my doing that you went. I sent you for her peace of mind's sake.

That you have married a Catholic while you yourself are a Protestant is no one's fault but your own, as you did not ask anybody's permission. Unfortunately you have inherited from your mother a hysterical temperament, and from your father a certain matter-of-factness which prevents your enjoying life.

I feel compelled to act like a surgeon who undertakes a necessary operation, in spite of the patient's objection to scars.

The only time your husband was here on a visit I was able to get a certain impression of his character. You are right in saying that he is "dangerous to women through the animal magnetism which radiates from his person, at-



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tracting to him adults and children alike." And you might add, "through his natural amiability and his kindness." He makes no disguise of his vanity, but when you plume yourself on being his only chick because you alone resist him, you are adopting a dangerous line. The man who wishes to be worshipped will not be discouraged by superior airs, especially when these are put on, and you merely feign opposition in order to annoy him, and to conceal how much you are in love.

Owing to the position he holds he is the centre of much attention. He is unable, like most men, to diverge from the high road. Every movement of his is noticed, and may cause him unpleasantness. Thus his position forces him to be cautious. Yet you as his loving wife accuse him of giving to every woman what ought to be your position alone.

Your want of trust puts him on the rack. You pluck his nerves to pieces, and dissect his secret thoughts. You hate him for not

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

being unfaithful to you in deed in that you suspect continually that he is unfaithful to you in thought. You hurt him by telling him constantly that your mutual life is animal and savage, that he lacks soul, and does not comprehend what it is to love with the soul as you do. He retorts by calling you hysterical.

Then a young girl comes to stay in your house. She falls in love with your husband, and he is in love with her. You say, "She made a dead set at him." Instead of deciding to remove her immediately you watch for proofs of the criminal relations which you suspect. I don't condemn you for getting hold of your husband's letters by any means honourable or the reverse, because jealous wives are as irresponsible for their actions as patients with a temperature of a hundred and six. You triumph and cause yourself diabolical torments by revelling in the stolen love-letters. You find in them the "psycho-

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

logical" impulse that you have missed in your husband's love.

What ought you to do now? Either you must go, as you cannot stay with a man who is in love with another; or you must remain and leave him and his feelings in peace. Nonsense! Instead you thrust a dagger into his heart and turn it in the wound. If he moans, you ask, "Do you still love her?"

You think that love can be wrenched out of a man's life as easily as a tooth is drawn, root and all.

Agony brings your husband to reason and his senses, he belies what he feels and cries, "I love no one but you!" But even then can you leave him alone? Certainly not. You now insist on his telling everything, betraying and deceiving. You know, as a Catholic, he cannot claim a divorce, and yet you ask if he will marry her in the case of your retiring? Not a word of this offer do you intend seri-

## ELSIE LINDTNER

ously. You want to humiliate and torment him.

Next you make a scene with the girl, pervert his words about her, misapply your knowledge, and use such expressions as "Impurity, lies, vulgarity." But she only answers, "I love him, I cannot do anything else." And you find this exasperating.

Not once has it occurred to you to set your husband free. He belongs to you, he is in your power. You begin all over again. You haven't an hour's rest because you must spy on all his actions. You reproach him for being a Catholic. His baseness is trebled because he is Catholic—as if lies had anything to do with articles of faith.

You are leading a pretty life! Then your husband falls ill. For a long time he has complained of a tumour in his chest. "If it grows it'll have to be removed for it may be cancer." This is a trifling matter, or you inwardly triumph over it as "a judgment."

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

One morning he leaves the house on business. He takes leave of you tenderly and comes back over and over again to kiss you with emotion. You at once suspect deceit, and heap reproaches on him for intending to do something behind your back. He smiles sadly and says, "If that is so you will soon hear what it is."

At mid-day you have a "vision," if what you write is true. You see him lying on the operating table. You telephone to the hospital and learn that the operation has taken place. You hurry there and meet the girl.

To you he has not spoken of the serious ordeal in store for him. But he has sent for her.

This is the last drop that overflows your cup of anguish. You take your sick husband home. You torture him till he says, "Death would be better than this."

And now you ask me what you ought to do.

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

It would be much simpler to tell you what you ought not to have done.

But it is too late for that now. All the same, I will, to the best of my poor abilities, give you advice and the benefit of my experience, gathered from contemplation of many wretched and foolish cases in which people tread happiness under foot, and then instantly lament what they have lost.

First and foremost, Agnete, you must look into yourself, and get rid of the lie which like an octopus has caught you in its embrace and smothers the best within you.

The lie about your husband's deficiency. Your expressions of longing for a harmony of souls is a lie, just as your pretension to love with the soul and not with the senses is a lie.

You are one of the many women who, for reasons which I fail to understand, find no salvation in your relations to a man. What for him was the highest enjoyment, for you was only a torturing excitement. A

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

physical shortcoming in yourself would in him appear a crime in your eyes. Instead of honestly and frankly explaining to him the state of things and the cause of your unhappy condition, you try to seek satisfaction by making scenes.

Don't you see, dear child, a clever woman never makes scenes. It isn't politic. A scene that lasts an hour does fourteen days' detriment to her appearance.

Your question, "What ought I to do now?" really means, "How can I punish him further?"

Rather you should ask, "What can I do to heal his wounded soul?" And this is my answer, Agnete, "You can do it by confessing your own mistakes, and forgetting his."

You must not ape humility, and let something cry within you, "See what a sacrifice I am making!"

No, you must acknowledge your wrongdoing and not let it out of sight. Take it

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

in both hands, hold it tightly like a costly goblet, and keep your eyes fixed on it. You should remember that it is no credit to you that you have not betrayed him because there has been no necessity; for you know nothing of the mad impulse that can arise between two human creatures, suddenly, like a storm in the thickest part of the wood.

Above all things, recognise that at the time your husband summoned his mistress to his side when he thought he was going to die, he acted from the greatest and most primitive of instincts—the instinct of love.

Tell him that you have been wrong. Show him your love. Give him your best. Not for an hour or a day, but every hour and every day. That is the only way to his heart, and to your own peace of mind. And then the time will come when mutual forgiveness has performed its miracle.

Try to understand what I mean.

Hearty good wishes from your mother's old



## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

friend. If you like you may show your husband this letter.

ELSIE LINDTNER.

It is certainly a very fine trait in Magna's character, that she who used to be—well, never mind, I won't say what—has never breathed the name of her child's father to any living soul.

The man must have been good and strong, and I am fortunate indeed that my Kelly has found a protector in the little fellow. Oluf doesn't like Kelly drinking schnaps. So Kelly doesn't drink schnaps. Oluf wants Kelly's moustache to grow, so Kelly lets it grow.

“So long as I have Oluf, who takes care of me, you need not be afraid of me.” Those words are close to my heart.

And yet I have still some anxiety. The world is so big, and here things are reduced to such a groove. I notice the effect on Oluf

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

when Kelly tells him about America. Who knows if the day will not come when the pair come to bid me and Magna farewell to go off on adventures?

Oluf was making plans the other day for travelling to Canada, and camping in the great forests far away from civilisation. The boy had fixed it all up. They were to live in the trees, and live by hunting and fishing. Perched up on the highest branches they would spread out their nets, and catch fish out of the great river that rolls through the forest. They would only enter a town twice a year to sell the skins of the beasts they had caught.

Oluf is not too small for such dreams, but Kelly—

I am so unwilling to budge from here till Kelly has taken root in the soil so that he can't tear himself away. He promises to stay here always, but what is a promise?

*ELSIE LINDTNER*

DEAR MAGNA,

I must really tell you without delay. Richard has been to see me. When Lucie brought in his card I was dumbfounded. But the moment he entered the room, thank God I got over my feeling of embarrassment. We stood and looked at each other, and were at a loss how to begin the conversation, till it occurred to Richard to say something about Kelly. He knew, of course, the whole story.

It did one good to see the dear fellow, to speak to him again. He said he could only stay a few minutes, and he stayed two hours. In reality, it was his little wife who sent him to see me. She thought it so extraordinary that she should not know me, who had played such an important part for so many years in Richard's life.

We spoke a great deal of our respective children, and were both equally proud.

Now Richard has promised to visit me next

## ELSIE LINDTNER

Sunday with his family. You and our boys come, too. In the course of the week I shall return Richard's call.

Do you know, Magna, I intend to make it quite a festive occasion, and there shall be no feeling in the matter that I am a divorced wife. You will have to lend me a few things as most of my china is over in the villa, and I shall order the food to be sent in from Palace Street. One can be certain of getting it good there, or would you advise going to an hotel? I have got so out of the habit of entertaining that I feel nervous at the thought of it.

Anyhow, you must come, Magna, and take care that Kelly is properly attired. Also see to his hands.

When Richard was gone, I sat a long time and meditated in retrospect on how very nicely he and I had once got on together. The one drawback was that we had no children. On that account I made the sacrifice

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

and left him. I have been royally rewarded for it, through my Kelly.

Richard's wife plays a good game of bridge, and we have already started a society for the winter. The report of your enormous pluck has reached the old Market Place, for Richard spoke of you in terms of the warmest admiration and esteem. At parting we both positively had tears in our eyes.

May I, without hurting you, give a hint? Please put on your silk dress, Magna. I shall have a new one made, I think, as quickly as possible. You see, this is to be a very important event in my life.

Embrace my boy for me, and remember what I said about his hands.

ELSIE.

DEAR JEANNE,

It is wrong of me to have been so lazy lately about writing. But I have had so much to do. I have, as a matter of fact, moved house. It happened in a twinkling. This habitation became to let through a death, and mine was taken by a young married couple.

Now I am living on the beach road so far out that I am hardly to be reckoned as belonging to Copenhagen. Can you guess why I have moved? -Simply to be nearer the farm, so childish does one become with advancing age. Magna advised me strongly to come out altogether, but I am not inclined to do that. I am always and shall be a child of towns, though in the year that Kelly has been learning to be a farmer I have taken an almost incredible interest in cows, pigs, winter

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

crops, and all the rest of it. My life is so full of richness and light, I have nearly more joy than I can bear, and no troubles at all.

Magna manages our "estate," as she always calls it to please me, most admirably. And how well she understands the art of setting others to work!

My Kelly and her little Oluf are now, as they always have been, inseparable, and I believe that the blue-eyed little comrade exercises a most beneficent influence on Kelly. Magna told me one day that she had heard Oluf saying—the boy lay in a hay-cock and didn't know that Magna was on the other side of it taking her after-dinner nap—"I have no father, for my father died ten years before I was born. But if you like to be my father, I shall be quite content to have no other."

Magna visits me every time that she has anything to do in the town. When the window is open I can hear the crack of her whip above all the rest. And will you believe it,

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

Jeanne, my heart begins to beat at the sound, for it means that the boys are with her, or that Magna is coming to tell me about them. You should just see her sitting rosy and upright in the dog-cart, her head hidden in a hood, with an old sealskin on, all rubbed the wrong way, the same that twenty years ago formed a topic of conversation the whole winter through, because it had cost her poor, struggling husband goodness knows how many thousands.

Magna is now getting on for sixty. But no one would think it. She beams as if the whole world were at her feet. I look at least ten years older, although, God knows, I take a lot of trouble over my hair, and touch up my cheeks a little, as I always did. She makes a fuss about getting out of the cart as if the coachman could not look after the butter and eggs.

Just think, she gets up at four in summer and at six in winter, and works for two.



## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

There is no work that she considers is too menial.

Lately she and Kelly painted all the four buildings for Whitsun. And they did it like the wind, so that one could hardly believe one's own eyes. I sat out on the verandah and watched, and was nearly sick with delight.

Then we had roast ribs and oxeyes for dinner. How Kelly eats! You can have no conception of his appetite. It's not elegant, but oh, so splendid! And after they have been slaughtering Kelly brings me lambs' fry, black puddings, and liver sausages. What I once couldn't tolerate now tastes to me better than the finest Astrakhan caviare.

How I chat on all about my own affairs. But I don't forget my little fellow-traveller on that account, and her troubles are mine. Still, I am not going to make them such a serious matter as you do, for they are not worth it. You have arrived at a stage when every-

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

thing looks to you black, and must look so. I should be deeply pained if I had not long ago seen what the cause of it is. You are now just about the age I was when we first met each other; that age which for women is so difficult and dangerous. And the inexplicable happiness is not granted to every woman to come through the time unscathed and triumphant as I did.

I have thought about it, and wondered what the reason could be why I, contrary to every one else, should remain during those years much the same as always; and I have come to the conclusion that it was because I lived so superficially at that time, and without any deep feeling for other people.

But you, little Jeanne, since you linked your fate so fortunately with Malthe's, have been a sheer compost of love-worship and self-sacrifice. I could have foretold long ago that your transition age would be a hard time. But now try yourself to make it easier. Re-

## ELSIE LINDTNER

view the circumstances, sift, and explain them to yourself.

You have something to be thankful for that does not fall to the lot of one woman in ten thousand. Your husband continues to love you as much to-day as when you first became his. Does that not counter-balance everything? Are the little cosmopolitan godless angels of children really so hard to bring up as you think? They have, of course, the artistic temperament, and you attempt to model them into normal human beings. You will never succeed.

And is Malthe's depression of spirits of any great significance? There is cause for it. He has of late, with justice or injustice, been overlooked, and younger powers have been preferred before him; his name has no longer the *cachet* it once had, and even his talent seems to have taken a back seat. But, dear Jeanne, you are greatly to blame for this. You have loved your husband so blindly and

## ELSIE LINDTNER

fondly that you have not set him on a pedestal, but you have built a castle of air far up in the highest clouds, and there you have placed him like a golden ball on the most inaccessible pinnacle, with no one above him and no one near him. . . . You have fed his ambition and stifled your own natural, critical faculty, instead of standing at his side and being helpful to him in deciding between good and mediocre, and now you complain that you cannot console, and that he spurns you. You are ashamed to say so, but I read between the lines that you are very, very unhappy. . . . And it is all because you are not well, dear Jeanne, and your despondency is likely to last some years.

But I could hit, I think, on ways and means of putting your cares to flight; if only you will at once make up your mind to bring your little flock northwards, so that I may take them with me to the Villa this summer, and

## ELSIE LINDTNER

teach the little goose-herds, the Parisian, the Sicilian, and the Smyrna child, indifferent Danish, while you and your Malthe close the house, store your furniture, and trot round the globe.

Don't let the thought of money stand in your way. Tell Joergen from me that he may with an easy hand use the money which he would set aside as a dowry for his daughters.

He must be ashamed of himself if he has not that opinion about his own flesh and blood, that it will be a pure joy to any one to take over the girls, even if they come without a rag to their backs or clothed in flour sacks.

Besides, I have made my will, and, dear Jeanne, if I once played *la banque* at Monte Carlo, I am not likely to do it again.

What a glorious summer it will be over there in the White Villa with your chicks.

*ELSIE LINDTNER*

And we'll borrow Magna's Oluf and my Kelly for a week, too. What does my old travelling companion say to this?

Much love to you and to your husband, and the whole small flock, from

Yours always,

ELSIE LINDTNER.

Poor Jeanne and poor Joergen. . . . So it fares worse with you than I thought.

I have the greatest desire to travel over to them and mediate, but in these days my heart is too touchy and my neuralgia a consideration. I ought not by rights to sit out on the balcony in the cool evening air, but I never could be careful.

But it shall not happen; it would be too foolish and irresponsible a step—people don't separate in a hurry like that without a ghost of a real reason. All very well if Malthe had another string to his bow, or if Jeanne was in love with another man, but, good

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

Lord! one of them couldn't live without the other, and yet she talks of having "weighed" the matter, and thoroughly thought it out. I am so angry my hands tremble.

Jeanne must really collect herself, and understand that all this is nothing but a transition. When I think of it, I can recall no case among the many I have known—except, of course, my own—of a single woman who has managed to get through these years without a slight rumpus of some kind. Afterwards they have taken endless trouble to patch up the wounds they have inflicted. Now, Jeanne has been more than unreasonable in this respect. There isn't a man in the world who can stand such an everlasting adoration.

It was certainly brutal of him to say, "Mind yourself, your house, and your children, but don't meddle with my work."

But he meant nothing more by it than a child in a temper does when it vents its anger in trampling on a favourite toy. Yet the

## ELSIE LINDTNER

words rankled in Jeanne as a reproach—a reproach for what?

He has lost faith in his talent. Therefore he is irritable and dejected, and Jeanne, who all these years has had enough to do in bringing children into the world, and caring for them and him, now stands suddenly still, looks round and behind her, and feels disillusioned. Now is the time when she wants the tenderest words he has ever lavished on her, but he, with his head full of building plans, sees no sense or object in two people talking of love—two people who have proved their love with their whole life.

One of them ought to fall sick unto death . . . so that the other should forget his small grievances.

Well, we shall see. If Jeanne listens to my advice, and lets the children come up here, all will be well. . . . A little air and freedom is what they need; otherwise I shall have to sacrifice myself and for the second time knock



## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

about the world with my little travelling companion.

So I have been in my old home once more! Weeks will have to go by before I get over the re-visiting of it. Every trace of me had been removed—with a scrupulous care and thoroughness as if every piece of furniture, every hanging and picture had been dangerously infected. Doors had been obliterated, and new ones cut in walls which used to be doorless. Not even the peaceful white fireplaces were there any longer, but instead gilded radiators. Had I never inhabited the rooms they could not have seemed more strange. I looked in vain for Richard's oak bookcase, and the panels from his grandmother's country place.

I had to see everything. My namesake—she who bears the name by right, not courtesy—led me from one room to another. It was as if she asked me incessantly, "Isn't there

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

anything that reminds you of your reign?"  
No, nothing, not the very least thing.

And then when we sat round the table at which Richard and I used to sit alone with the servants waiting behind our chairs, all the vacant places were filled with children whose appearance in the world was one of the conditions of my departure. Wonderful, wonderful! and a little sad.

I noticed how Richard exerted himself that I should feel at ease. But he, too, I think, was moved by the oddness of the situation.

She calls me Madame Elsie, and I call her Madame Beathe.

Involuntarily I glanced round for the big portrait Kröyer in his day painted of me, the portrait which Richard simply idolised. He saw what I was looking for, and cast down his eyes. I felt inclined to say, "Dearest friend, don't let us be sentimental. What was once is no longer. But the picture was a

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

true work of art, and for that reason you should have let it hang where it was."

One thinks such things, but doesn't say them.

I was shown, too, the daughters' bedroom upstairs, and there—there hung my picture among photographs of actresses and school friends. Finally it will land in the attic unless it occurs to some one to make money out of it.

Why is it I cannot get rid of a feeling of bitterness and humiliation? They were all very kind and considerate. But when Madame Beathe joking suggested a match between her Annelisa and my Kelly, I felt near to crying. Annelisa is a thoroughly nice girl, it is true. But I cannot endure the thought of Kelly being looked down on, because of his country manners. And she does look down on him.

The little mistress has one fault. She is too immaculately tidy. I noticed that all the

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

carpets had dusting sheets over them, and naturally supposed their removal had been forgotten, till I saw that every single article on her dressing-table was covered in the middle of the day with gauze, and I heard her scolding one of the maids for not washing her hands before beginning to lay the cloth after touching some books. Richard, I am sure, finds it trying.

When he smokes a cigar she sits on pins and needles for fear he shall scatter the ash about. And God knows that for a man Richard is tidy enough. She discovered a mark on the white window-ledge, only a raindrop, I believe, but got up twenty times at least to scrub, brush, and breathe on the spot.

It gives me food for thought. It is not for me to judge what she does and how she acts. But I can't get over it. I feel bound to criticise her. And somehow the idea will bother me that this is my home she is fussing about in, and not the other way about.

## ELSIE LINDTNER

Annelisa kissed me at parting, and asked if she might soon come to see me. But she shall not come when Kelly is at home. That is certain.

And now they have invited me to a grand dinner-party.

\* \* \*

Kelly must have a tail-coat, there is no question of that.

\* \* \*

No, Kelly shall not have a dress suit. Kelly won't come with me to the dinner-party at Richard's. I am going alone.

\* \* \*

Pah! I am positively excited! It was a grand occasion. And it did me good to hear pretty speeches made about my appearance. The orchids certainly did go well with my

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

mauve silk. They couldn't have come from anywhere but Paris, of course.

Annelisa and I became great friends. She took me up to her room and confided in me that she and her mother don't get on.

You were afraid to move almost for fear of being told you were making things in a mess. And the child betrayed, by the way, the little domestic secret that her mother now had a bedroom to herself, because her father was so untidy in shaving. When no one was looking her mother went about with a duster and wiped away the marks left by the soles of your boots. Wasn't it too awful? But it didn't seem so dreadful to me, for all at once I saw plainly what it meant, and I consoled the child by telling her that in a year or two the scouring demon would be cleaned away.

Richard seems quite unconcerned. He doesn't dream of complaining. But if he has any memory, it must occur to him in looking back, how in the years that I was passing

## ELSIE LINDTNER

through the phase, everything inwardly and outwardly went on the same as usual.

Richard plays a brilliant game of bridge. But I must say I was utterly unprepared for Professor Rothe making the third. He behaved as if nothing whatever had passed between us. And Lili's name was not mentioned.

Richard said when I rose to go, "You have been the Queen of the Feast!" God knows I blushed.

Maybe that in his secret heart he recognises the great sacrifice I made for him. It was, undoubtedly, no easy matter to leave him and the beautiful house. But my exemplary conscience was sufficient reward, even if I had not afterwards received the guerdon of Kelly.

\* \* \*

I believe I shall succeed in having a chat with Madame Beathe about her *tic doloieux*. If one broaches the subject tactfully, it's pos-

## ELSIE LINDTNER

sible to achieve a great deal; and it is only a matter of getting her to see herself that her malady is an appendage of her years.

\* \* \*

What holes Kelly wears his stockings into, and how black he makes his pocket-handkerchiefs! I do believe the boy uses them to wash the cart-wheels.

\* \* \*

Kelly said yesterday, "And if you hadn't adopted me, I should have been in the gutter all my life." How he looks at me!

\* \* \*

I suppose I had better have left it alone. I was told that for others such a period of incapability might exist, but not for her. She knew the duties of a proper housewife, and did not attend to a fifth part of things and leave the rest in dirt and disorder.



## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

It was a little too much that I should not only come and interfere in her housekeeping, but ascribe to her a fictitious illness that only existed in my imagination. . . . And then followed a long story which to listen to was enough to make one laugh and weep together. Goodness! she had actually been jealous of my former régime, and had no peace till she had turned the whole house topsy-turvy. She didn't intend that I should know this. But the storm burst when she thought to-day I had been taking my revenge. Her one object in life was to live for her husband, her home, and her children, and she had no notions about posing as a beauty, and be painted by famous artists. And so on. . . .

She was so beside herself finally, that I was obliged to cave in, and say that I had made a mistake, she was not at the dangerous age, and her scouring mania was a perfectly natural instinct, and it was a pity that all housewives did not follow her example.

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

And then we were good friends again, and she told me that she was very glad I was really quite old.

Any woman so old and harmless, of course didn't count.

No, I shall not burn my fingers again. It is most curious how forgetful one becomes with the flight of years.

But forgetful is not exactly the right word. It is much more a sort of half-unconscious perversion of actual facts. The same kind of thing as parents making out to their children and almost believing it themselves, that when they were children they were absolute angels.

Magna, for instance, is capable of self-delusion and lying with regard to the miseries of her dangerous age. Magna, usually the soul of truthfulness, who never tries to make herself out better than she is, apparently believes that she got over those difficult years easily and calmly. Good God!

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

For once we nearly grew angry with one another. I maintained that it was nothing to be ashamed of, but rather an honour, that she had afterwards matured into the magnificent, vigorous creature she now is.

But she wouldn't hear of it. The only thing she would admit was Oluf, and she only did that because he is flesh and blood.

We both became vehement, and in the end Magna went the length of asserting in her excitement that I had been far more affected by the critical years than she and Lili Rothe put together!

It was useless to protest against such a ludicrous mis-statement of facts. But we very soon made it up again, and played our game of Friday bridge. Unfortunately Kelly had not come in with Magna.

He and Oluf had to sit up all night with a sick cow. It would have sufficed if one of them had done it, but where Kelly is there Oluf will be also.

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God bless Magna for her way of chatting about the two boys. I devour the words as they fall from her lips. It is so splendid to hear her. Magna thinks it will be a good thing for Kelly if he marries in a year or two . . . it seems almost as if she had fixed on some one already. What if it should be to the new dairy-maid? Well, I should not mind, so long as it was for my boy's happiness. In that event we must think of taking a farm for Kelly, for Kelly and Oluf.

\* \* \*

It would interest me to prove to Magna who was right. If I could bring myself to reading through once more what I wrote down in those days . . . yes, I will to-morrow.

\* \* \*

I am ashamed, oh, how ashamed I am! It is not fancy or forgery. I wrote every word

## ELSIE LINDTNER

of it in circumstances which bear witness to the honesty of the writer. I can never look either Magna or Jeanne in the face again . . . or in my boy's.

Not I who have a thousand times dreamed and wished with all my heart that I had brought him into the world! I can only hang my head now and be thankful that he never had such a person for his mother.

I, I, who strutted about like a peacock, proud of my own perfections; I, who pointed the finger of scorn at others; I, who presumed with the rights of a judge to condemn or pardon others, inwardly jubilating triumphantly, "Thank God I am not as other men are."

*That* can never be erased, never made good.

Now that I have reached the evening of my days, and my one occupation is to sit and look out of the window at the people who pass, and dream happy dreams for my boy, I commit

## ELSIE LINDTNER

no thought or deed that needs the veil of oblivion.

But then, when I was in my prime . . . when I might have applied my gifts for usefulness and pleasure—I was such a . . .

The memory of it can never be wiped out. It can never be made good.

And I had thought that Kelly was to read it all after my death, so that he might learn to know what I really was; learn to despise me as I lay in my grave . . . I have had the fire lit though it is summer. I intend to destroy every line. Every line!

But will that prevent Kelly beholding me in all my pitiableness? Am I such a coward? Such a coward? . . . No, Kelly *shall* read it, every scrap when I am dead.

Then he shall see what a deplorable, wretched creature I was till love entered my life, when he did. Then he shall know the great miracle which love wrought.

## *ELSIE LINDTNER*

Kelly has a claim to me in bad as well as good. . . .

I feel to-day so ineffably tired. It seems as if this day were to be my last. The day of judgment, when I am to stand face to face with myself.

But the day of judgment is to be followed by regeneration. Kelly is to be my regeneration. Not for myself do I pray to be granted a year, an hour; I pray for Kelly's sake alone, that our meeting that night may not have been in vain. This prayer throbs from my lips into Eternity.

Will it be heard?

\* \* \*

There are the bells chiming for vespers. Now Kelly is coming home from his work, so tall, strong, and healthy. They are busy with the spring ploughing, and to-morrow

*ELSIE LINDTNER*

will be Sunday. Then I shall see him, have him to myself. . . .

Kelly, Kelly . . . why aren't you here at this hour? Kelly, I want to see you, and to thank you.

Be good . . . be happy. . . .



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